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The works of the right
reverend father in God,

THE

WORKS

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

THOMAS WILSON, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

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THE

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OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

THOMAS WILSON, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

VOL. II.

SERMONS I. TO L.

A NEW EDITION.

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CONTENTS.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

(Page 1.)

SERMON I.

(Page 5.)

True way of profiting by God's Word read or preached.

Luke viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

SERMON II.

(Page 18.)

The true way of profiting by sermons.

Luke viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear, &c.

SERMON III.

(Page 29.)

The true way of profiting by sermons.

Luke viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear, &c.

SERMON IV.

(Page 42.)

The true way of profiting by sermons.

Luke viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear, &c.

SERMON V.

(Page 55.)

The true way of profiting by sermons.

Luke xi. 28.

Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.

SERMON VI.

(Page 68.)

The true way of profiting by the public worship.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

I will pray with the understanding.

SERMON VII.

(Page 82.)

The true reason why people do not profit by sermons.

Heb. iv. 2.

The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

SERMON VIII.

(Page 88.)

The misery of not attending to the Word and ministers of God.

Prov. v. 11—13.

And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed; [that is, when you come to die]; *and say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me?*

SERMON IX.

(Page 100.)

The shame and danger of being christians without Christianity.

Ezek. xliii. 10.

Thou Son of Man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

SERMON X.

(Page 112.)

The shame and danger of being christians without Christianity.

Ezek. xliii. 10.

Thou son of man, &c.

SERMON XI.

(Page 124.)

Fear and care absolutely necessary in our way to heaven.

1 Pet. i. 17.

Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

SERMON XII.

(Page 139.)

The parable of the faithful servant practically explained.

Matt. xxv. 20, 21.

He that had received five talents, came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

SERMON XIII.

(Page 150.)

True repentance absolutely necessary to salvation.

Matt. iii. 8—10.

Bring forth fruits meet for repentance; [that is, answerable to amendment of life;] *and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

SERMON XIV.

(Page 164.)

The great blessing and the absolute necessity of a Redeemer.

Luke ii. 10.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

SERMON XV.

XXI. (Page 171.)

The meaning and the extent of the salvation purchased by Jesus Christ, and the dreadful case of those who despise it.

1 Tim. i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

SERMON XVI.

(Page 179.)

Dispositions necessary to make Jesus Christ and His Gospel the greatest of all blessings.

Mal. iv. 2.

Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings.

SERMON XVII.

(Page 189.)

The duty of the ministers of the Gospel, and the unhappy state of those who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

2 Cor. v. 11.

Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

SERMON XVIII.

(Page 200.)

The design and history of Christianity.

1 Tim. i. 15. Tit. ii. 14. 1 Tim. iv. 1.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: and gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people [that is, a people peculiarly consecrated to Him], *zealous of good works. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; and* [Jude 4,] *turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.*

SERMON XIX.

(Page 212.)

All pleas and excuses for living in ignorance and sin made void by God, in making His will and purposes known in the Gospel.

John xv. 22.

But now they have no cloke [or, excuse] *for their sin.*

SERMON XX.

(Page 223.)

The corruption of human nature, and the necessity of a Redeemer.

Rom. vii. 24, 25.

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Why; the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXI.

(Page 236.)

The nature, the power, and the malice, of evil spirits; and the necessity of a stedfast faith in the protection of God.

Mark v. 13.

And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea.

SERMON XXII.

(Page 246.)

The necessity, and the great blessing and comfort, of securing the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

Rom. viii. 14.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

SERMON XXIII.

(Page 254.)

The reason and the extent of God's love in sending His Son into the world, and the obligations this love lays upon christians.

1 John iv. 9.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him [that is, through faith in Him].

SERMON XXIV.

(Page 266.)

The necessity of loving Jesus Christ as our Saviour, Prince, and Lawgiver; and the true marks of such a love.

1 Cor. xvi. 22.

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema Maran-atha [that is, accursed when the Lord cometh to judgment].

SERMON XXV.

(Page 278.)

The christian's armour.

Ephes. vi. 10—19.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, &c.

SERMON XXVI.

(Page 288.)

The necessity of coming to some certainty whether we are in the way of salvation or not.

2 Cor. xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith [that is, whether ye be true christians, and in the way of salvation; whether your lives be according to your profession].

SERMON XXVII.

(Page 300.)

The great duty of worshipping God.

Rev. iv. 10, 11.

The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, (that is, before God,) *and worship Him that liveth for ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created.*

SERMON XXVIII.

(Page 308.)

The great duty of acknowledging and glorifying God put in practice.

Psalm xxix. 2.

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name.

SERMON XXIX.

(Page 319.)

The great danger of delaying our repentance.

John ix. 4.

The night cometh when no man can work.

SERMON XXX.

(Page 328.)

The condition of obtaining that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Psalm xxix. 10.

The Lord shall give His people the blessing of peace.

SERMON XXXI.

(Page 339.)

Works, not words only, necessary to salvation.

Matt. vii. 21.

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.

SERMON XXXII.

(Page 347.)

Success of all our labours depends on God's blessing.

Luke v. 4, 5.

Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering, said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net, &c.

SERMON XXXIII.

(Page 358.)

The perplexity and danger of the double-minded.

James i. 8.

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

SERMON XXXIV.

(Page 368.)

The Creed put into practice.

Tit. i. 16.

They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him; being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate [that is, void of judgment].

SERMON XXXV.

(Page 383.)

The Creed put into practice.

John xvii. 3.

This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God; and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.

SERMON XXXVI.

(Page 398.)

The Creed put into practice.

Acts ii. 32, 33.

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.

SERMON XXXVII.

(Page 413.)

The first and great command; or, the love of God.

Mark xii. 32—34.

And the Scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, &c.

SERMON XXXVIII.

(Page 425.)

The second great command; or, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Mark xii. 32—34.

And the Scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, &c.

SERMON XXXIX.

(Page 435.)

Of holiness, without which no man must see the Lord.

Heb. xii. 14.

Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

SERMON XL.

(Page 449.)

The resurrection; or, the reward of holiness.

Luke xx. 34—36.

Jesus answering, said unto them, the children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be

accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

SERMON XLI.

(Page 460.)

The duty of improving the talents committed to our trust.

Luke xii. 48.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.

SERMON XLII.

(Page 475.)

The duty and advantages of rightly considering the shortness of human life.

Psalm xc. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

SERMON XLIII.

(Page 485.)

The great danger of not knowing the day of visitation.

Luke xix. 41—44.

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it; saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

SERMON XLIV.

(Page 497.)

The great duty of instructing the ignorant.

Mark iv. 28.

The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

SERMON XLV.

(Page 507.)

The danger of living in any known sin.

Rom. i. 28.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.

XV.

SERMON XLVI.

(Page 520.)

The example of the Jews a warning to Christians.

1 Cor. x. 11.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, &c.

SERMON XLVII.

(Page 524.)

The repentance of sinners matter of joy in heaven.

Luke xv. 7, 10.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

SERMON XLVIII.

(Page 529.)

The design of God's judgments upon the children of men.

Matt. vi. 11.

Give us this day our daily bread.

SERMON XLIX.

(Page 534.)

The folly of undertaking any business of moment, without regard to the will and honour of God.

Prov. xxi. 30.

There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.

SERMON L.

(Page 542.)

The suppression of vice and impiety, the duty of all persons in authority.

Gen. vi. 1—3, 7.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them; that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man.—And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, &c.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Almighty God, Maker of all things, Judge of all men, graciously receive the supplications and prayers of this congregation, for themselves and for all estates and conditions of men.

Lord, in mercy, grant unto us, and unto all sinners, a true sense of our errors, and grace to amend whatever we have done amiss, that iniquity may not be our ruin. Let not those judgments fall upon us, which our sins have justly deserved: and grant that Thy great mercy and forbearance may oblige us to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

Have mercy upon the work of Thy hands, that all the world may come to the knowledge of Thee, and of Thy goodness in Jesus Christ; that all who are weary with the burden of their sins, may know where to find rest unto their souls.

Preserve Thy Church in the midst of this uncertain world, and prepare her for what Thy providence shall bring forth, that neither prosperity may corrupt Thy faithful servants, nor adversity discourage them from professing the truth.

Keep this Church and Nation in the peaceable enjoyment of Thy Word and Sacraments; and grant that we may all live answerable to the means of grace which Thy providence hath afforded us.

Bless all the reformed Churches; keep them from all wicked and dangerous errors; and bring into the way of truth all such as have gone astray; that Thy Kingdom, and the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be glorified.

O God! whose Kingdom ruleth over all, bless these Nations to which we belong; that peace, and truth, and justice, that true religion and piety, may be secured and countenanced; that all ignorance and profaneness, and whatever else opposeth Thy Divine Will made known to us, may be effectually discouraged.

To this end we pray God to hear us, for the King's Majesty, that his days may be many, his government happy, his commands just and equal, and his people faithful and obedient: for the Royal Family, that we may be blessed with a succession of princes fearing God: for all such as are in council and authority (and especially for the High Court of Parliament), that they may consult the honour of God, the true interest of His Church, and the welfare of the People: for the Bishops and Pastors of Christ's flock, that they may constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke and oppose vice, and be living examples of those graces and virtues which they recommend to others: and the Lord Jesus Christ be always with them according to His promise; and grant unto the people of their flocks, that they may profit by them daily.

Blessed God and lover of souls, preserve, by Thy grace, those that are in the way of life; enlighten the minds of the ignorant; awaken the consciences of the careless; silence the gainsayers; convert the profane; and bring them all to Thine everlasting kingdom.

For the Isle of Man.] Bless the Lord and Government of this Isle; continue to us the blessings of peace and unity, in Church and state, which we enjoy; preserve us from all false doctrine, and every false way, and root out all growing vices, that there may ever be in this place a generation fearing God, and working righteousness.

In Time of War.] Preserve this land; and, in Thy own good time, deliver all Christian countries from the miseries of war; scatter the people that delight in it; and grant that such as fall, die not in their sins unrepented of.

For City, or Corporation.] Bless the Magistrates and Government of ——, and the lawful industry of its inhabitants. Let brotherly love and charity increase amongst them; and root out all growing evils.

Sea.] Receive into Thy Almighty and gracious protection

the persons and the ships of those that are absent; preserve them from the dangers of the seas, from the violence of enemies, and from all sad accidents; that they may return in safety, to enjoy the fruits of their labours, and to praise the Lord for His mercies to them.

At a Funeral.] Make us all mindful of our latter end, that death may never overtake us unawares; teach us, in the many spectacles of sorrow, sickness, and mortality, which we behold, to see how frail and how uncertain our condition is, that we may seriously apply our hearts unto that holy and heavenly wisdom, whilst we live here, which may in the end bring us to life everlasting.

For Plenty.] Visit the earth and the seas with Thy blessing; and open the hearts of those upon whom Thou shalt bestow these favours, that they may do good and distribute: and give us all grace, that we may not be corrupted by Thy blessings.

We commend unto the tender mercy of God, all sick and dying persons; all that are in affliction of mind or body, or under any pressing calamity; all that are poor, and have none else to help them; and especially all such as suffer persecution for a righteous cause.

Lord, pity and sanctify the miseries of this life, to the everlasting benefit of all that suffer; that the tears of the oppressed, the pains of the afflicted, the wants of the poor, may all help forward, and end in, the salvation of their immortal souls.

We beseech God to hear our prayers for all those that never pray for themselves, that they may see the danger, before it is too late, of living without God in the world.

And God Almighty grant, that we may all of us have worthy thoughts of His Majesty, for His great power in creating us; for His wonderful providence in preserving us; for His great goodness in redeeming us by Jesus Christ; for whose doctrine and example, and for the example of all His faithful servants, we pray God make us truly thankful, and grant us grace so to follow their steps, that we with them be made partakers of a blessed resurrection.

That we may obtain these blessings, and whatever else is needful for us, let us all join, and, with one heart and voice,

pray to God in that perfect form of words which Jesus Christ hath taught us:

Our Father, which art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON I.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY GOD'S WORD READ OR PREACHED.

Vouchsafe, O God, to direct me in this work, and bless this discourse for the good of my flock; that both I and they may glorify Thee for the truths they shall hear. Render them tractable and obedient to Thy Word, and me faithful in delivering it; that I may save myself, and them that hear me, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Luke viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. See Mark 4. 9; Heb. 2. 1—4; James 1. 21; 1 Thess. 2. 13; 4. 1.

Good christian people; I am going to set before you the great blessing of attending to the Word of God, whether read or preached to you, and the true way of profiting thereby; as also, the very great hazard you run, of living under the light of the Gospel, and the ordinances of God, and not being bettered by them.

There is nothing more certain, than that many christians are eternally ruined for want of considering the truths they hear every Lord's Day, and by not laying them to heart.

They come, indeed, to the church; and they hear the Scriptures read to them. They hear what God commands, and what He requires of them. They are put in mind of what must certainly come hereafter; of *death*, of *judgment*, of *heaven*, and of *hell*. And yet they return home as little affected, as if these things were not true, or as if they did not at all concern them. And what is the consequence of this? Why, they are called christians, *though they do not the things which Christ hath commanded them*. They hope for salva- [Luke 6. 46.]

SERM. I.

tion, without being converted; and under this delusion they die, and go into eternity.

To prevent this destructive consequence, our Lord has given this following strict charge to all His followers: TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR. *Take heed,* for your salvation depends upon it, that you remember, and make good use of, what you hear: FOR WHOSOEVER HATH, that is, hath benefited by what he hath already heard, God will increase his knowledge and his graces: BUT WHOSOEVER HATH NOT, that is, have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it; such are unworthy of more favours, and, by a just judgment of God, will be deprived of the knowledge and graces which they seemed to have.

TAKE HEED, therefore, HOW YOU HEAR: that is, whether you come prepared to hear with a *serious, teachable* temper; with a purpose to *learn* your duty, and to *practise* what you hear.

TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR: and that you hear those only who, by the order and providence of God, are appointed to instruct you. Never, sure, was more need of this caution.

[2 John 7.] *Many deceivers,* saith the Apostle, *are entered into the world;* many lewd, profane, and antichristian books; many agents of Satan, and seducing spirits; and therefore beware and avoid them as you love your souls.

Lastly: TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR. Remember whose *ministers* you hear, whose *word,* whose *commands,* whose *promises,* whose *threatenings,* you hear. They are not the words of man, but the *Word of God,* delivered by His *own Son,* confirmed by *miracles,* and reported to you *by His own ministers.*

It may be, you imagine, that you know your duty as well as the preacher who is appointed to instruct you. Be it so. But remember, that whatever *his* talents and *yours* may be,

[Rom. 13. 4.] *he is a minister of God to you for good,* if you hear and obey his godly admonitions. And remember too, that the most eloquent, learned man on earth cannot edify you without God's blessing. And lastly, that God *has* made, and *can* make, His Word, out of the mouth of the meanest of His ministers, effectual for the conversion of those that hear them with reverence.

Well then; whoever hopes to benefit by hearing, must come with *humility*, and a *teachable temper of mind;* must resolve to receive *instruction, reproof,* and *advice,* as coming from God; and must strive to remember what he hears.

It will *startle* you, and, I hope, will *affect your hearts,* to hear the true reason why the generality of people do not profit by sermons, and by the Word of God read to them. It is not I, but JESUS CHRIST, who tells you, that "the seed is the Word of God:" that "those by the way-side are they that hear. Then cometh the devil;" *observe that;* "then cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." [Luke 8. 11, 12.]

You see who it is that tempts you to sit down with indifference, when the Word of God is read or spoken; who it is that suggests to your mind other matters, when you should be attending to the things which concern your souls: you hear from Christ Himself, that it is the devil, and that the end thereof is damnation. Let this dreadful truth, I beseech you, oblige you *at this time,* and at all times, to hearken with attention to the Word of God. And remember what our Lord said to those that heard His Word, and would not mind it: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for you." [Matt. 10. 15; 11. 24.]

It behoves you therefore, as ever you hope to escape this dreadful judgment; it concerns you, I say, to come to church with a teachable temper, with a sincere desire, whether to learn, or to be put in mind of your duty. It concerns you to hear with an humble, attentive mind, and with a full purpose of heart to order your life accordingly; and then the Word you hear will become indeed, what St. Paul calls it, *the Word of Salvation to every one that believeth.* [Rom. 1. 16.]

And that you may always attend to what is written in the Gospel with the greatest regard, and assurance of being true and certain, take notice of and remember what was declared by GOD Himself in a voice from heaven, *This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him.* [Luke 9. 35.]

It is not a poor, ignorant creature, as I am, who tells you WHAT YOU MUST DO TO BE SAVED; what you must do to escape eternal misery; but it is the *Son of God Himself,* sent from heaven for *this very* end; to shew unto us the way to life

SERM. I. everlasting. It is Him you hear, when you hear His Word; and it is Him you disregard, when you mind not what is said to you by His ministers.

But then, because it is not sufficient for a man to hear the truths of the Gospel, unless, through the grace of God, he applies them to himself, and considers how much he himself is concerned in them, and that otherwise he will be little the better for hearing the Word read or preached; I will, therefore, shew you how the most plain and unlearned christian may and ought to apply the things he hears, every one to himself, and put them in practice. I will also shew you, how the truths you hear may always suggest to your minds suitable petitions, in order to obtain the grace of God, without which *all* you hear, *all* you know, will signify nothing towards your salvation.

For example: suppose the sermon you heard was concerning THE DANGER OF INCONSIDERATION, or the sad effect of that little care and concern which the generality of christians have for their salvation.

Such a serious subject, if you mind it, must needs affect you; and you will be apt to say within yourself, 'I see plainly, that if I pass my days in a wretched, negligent manner, without taking care of my soul, without considering what will come hereafter, whether I think of it or not, I can expect nothing when I die but misery everlasting. I see plainly, that I must not satisfy myself with the bare name of being a christian, without considering what the Christian Religion requires of me. If I do so, I shall be dealt with worse than an heathen. GOD Himself has declared, that great will be the punishment of wicked men; and great the reward, great the happiness, of such as fear to offend Him, of such as are careful to obey His commands. And shall not this awaken me? Shall I go on, and live as if no harm would follow? Will not inconsideration ruin me, as well as if I were guilty of the greatest crimes? I take all possible care of my worldly concerns, and to avoid temporal evils; and shall I not be concerned for evils that will last for ever? It is true, I see others as little concerned as I am myself; but will this be any comfort to me, if we are all miserable at the last?

'I should be astonished to hear a man say, that *he does not*

believe one word of the Gospel: and yet, it is plain, it will be the same thing in the end, with those that have not believed one word of the Gospel, and with those that have not laid the truths of the Gospel to heart. I am resolved, therefore, what I will do: I will go home, and beg of God to touch my heart with a lasting sense of the danger I am in; that He will give me great concern for my soul; and that He will not suffer me to lead a careless life any longer.'

And you will be confirmed in these good purposes, if you shall be so happy (for so the providence of God often orders matters for our good);—if you shall be so happy, as in some other sermon to be put in mind of *the wretched condition of one who leads a careless and a sinful life:* and this both with respect to himself and to God.

If, for example, you have been plainly told, *what you cannot but know to be true,* that a person who leads a careless and a sinful life, can never be truly easy, or pleased with himself; that he is always doing that which he inwardly condemns; that he is afraid of that light which would let him see the danger he is in; and that though he has often proposed to lead a new life, yet he has as often neglected to do so.

If you have been told, *what is as true as the Gospel,* that while you live in wilful sin, there is not the filthiest creature so odious in your eyes, as you are in the eyes of God; that you are governed by the devil, and are in his service, and doing his work; that every moment you put off your repentance, *you are despising the goodness and long-suffering of God,* [Rom. 2. 4.] who continues your life for no other end, but that you may not be damned. If you hear, and are not startled at this, *it* [Rom. 1. 28.] *is because you are given over to a reprobate mind.*

Every man, who is not *so given over,* will certainly be afraid for himself; and if he hears a sermon concerning REPENTANCE, and a sinner's return to God, he will probably come to some such resolutions as these:

'I am convinced, *from God's own Word,* that a sinner has no other choice but either *repentance* or *damnation.* As long, therefore, as I have no hopes of pardon, I can have no comfort in life: and as long as I defer my repentance, I can have no hopes of pardon. And I see plainly, *from what I*

SERM. I.

have heard this day, that my repentance will signify very little, if I do not bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life. Is it not a great mercy, that God will accept of a sinner's repentance, after he has done so many ill things? Is it not great condescension in the Son of God to give us even His oath, that ALL SINS SHALL BE FORGIVEN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN; and that none ought to despair of mercy, but such only as will not be persuaded to forsake their evil ways? What a mercy is it that I have time to REPENT, *and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance!* And what a foolish, what a wretched creature should I be, if I should neglect such a mercy, and go on in my sins, and to my destruction? I will therefore, *through the Grace of God,* not defer my repentance for one moment, lest I be overtaken in sin, and be for ever undone.'

Some such (one would hope) would be the thoughts and the resolutions of any one who with attention had heard a sermon concerning *the necessity of repentance and a new life.*

A christian that reasons thus, and thus resolves, and acts accordingly, *is in the way of Salvation.* But that he may continue in that way, he will want to be often put in mind of the danger of *backsliding;* of the duties required of *him,* of *every man,* in that state of life in which the providence of God has placed him; of the *sins* he is chiefly to watch against; and of the *means of grace* which God has appointed to bring us to heaven.

For instance: you will hear THE DUTY OF PRAYER pressed upon all christians, as necessary to their salvation as their daily bread is to preserve their lives.

Will you return home without laying this to heart? You may, indeed, do so; but if you have any concern for your own soul, you will think better of it, and reason with yourself after some such manner as this:

'I now see the great sin of neglecting so necessary a duty as is this of *Prayer.* I see plainly, that I must renounce all pretence to religion, all hopes of salvation, if I neglect it any longer. I am convinced, that all the sins I ever committed, and which I have not confessed and begged pardon for, do stand in judgment against me. And what will become of me, if I die in this condition? And I have all the reason in

the world to believe, that God will withhold His blessings from me, if I do not give Him thanks for those I have already received. I have no reason to hope for God's protection and blessing upon myself, upon my children, or upon my labours, when I never pray for them. I am as subject to afflictions, to troubles, to calamities, as other people: how shall I bear them with patience, without the assistance of God's grace? How shall I escape the many temptations to wickedness, which I meet with daily, without praying for God's help and direction? In short, if I neglect this duty, how shall I escape eternal misery?

'I am resolved what to do. I will, by the grace of Almighty God, omit this duty of prayer no longer, lest I come short of heaven, and be for ever undone. I will, as I have been instructed, take all occasions of praying to God. When I set about any business of moment, I will pray Him to prosper my honest endeavours. Whenever I shall perceive that I have done any thing amiss, I will forthwith pray God to forgive me, and to give me grace to do so no more. If I am in trouble, or in distress, I will apply to the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort. If I am in any danger, I will pray Him to deliver me. If I am tempted to any sin, I will beseech Him to succour me. And I will not fail to give Him thanks, whenever He bestows any blessing upon me.

'By doing this, I shall be entitled to the favour and protection of God, and be always afraid of offending Him.

'But this is not all; for I am resolved, by the grace of God, to pray with my family, and for my family, every day, as ever I expect God's blessing to be with them, and myself. By this means, I shall put them under God's protection every morning and evening; I shall set them a good example of piety; and this is the only way to make my children and servants *serious, holy, honest,* and *diligent.* And I will, by God's help, do this faithfully, though I should be so unlearned as to be able to say no other prayer but the Lord's Prayer: I will hope God will hear me *according to the full meaning of that prayer,* if I say it devoutly upon my knees, and with my family.

'This will not hinder my worldly business; and I will trust in God, that He will doubly pay me for the loss of any time I spend in His service.'

SERM. I.

Every serious christian, who wishes well to his own soul, will, I say, *think* and *resolve*, when he has heard a sermon concerning *the Duty of Prayer*, after some such manner as this we have been speaking of.

Let us again suppose, that the sermon which you have heard has been concerning *the Meaning, and Benefit, and Duty, of receiving* THE LORD'S SUPPER. A serious person can hardly choose but make some such observations and resolutions as these:

'I have this day been invited to partake of the Lord's Supper;—an ordinance appointed by Christ Himself, and for this reason, that christians being often called upon to remember the love of their dying Saviour, and the occasion of His death, which was to make *their* peace with God, they might love Him with all their soul, and remember to observe the commands He has given them, in order to fit them for heaven. I am assured, that this is the only way to render our persons and our prayers acceptable to God; of obtaining the pardon of our sins, the grace of God, and everlasting life after death.

'I understand what duties are required to make me a worthy guest at that holy table. I must resolve to forsake those sins which cost Jesus Christ His life: and I must forgive, and love, and do good to others, since He has been so good and so kind to me, as to lay down His life for me. I dare not, therefore, I will not, turn my back upon an ordinance upon which my salvation depends. If I am not fit to go to this sacrament, I am sure that I am not in the way of life: I must be under God's displeasure. I have nothing, therefore, to do, but what, through God's grace, I will endeavour to do: and this is, to prepare myself as well as I am able; and for the rest, to trust in the mercy and goodness of my Saviour, to supply, by His grace, what is wanting on my part. And I shall easily know whether I have been a worthy communicant or not, *by the life I lead afterwards*.'

If at any time the minister of God is pressing upon you *the necessity of* AN HOLY LIFE, of walking worthy of your christian name and calling, do not forget it as soon as you go out of the church, but think thus with yourself:

'My punishment will surely be very great, if I, who call myself a christian, do lead a careless and an unchristian life. I see how blind those people are, who hope to go to heaven, without endeavouring to please God, and to keep His commandments. I hope I shall never forget a truth I have heard this day; that religion, and the way to please God, does not consist so much in observing the outward duties of Christianity, as in leading an holy life. I see plainly, that a man may go to the church, and to the sacrament, without being *just*, or *humble*, or *devout*, or *temperate*, or *charitable*. And that the reason why we go to church, and pray to God, and hear His Word, is this; that we may obtain *His* grace to enable us to lead a *sober*, a *righteous*, and a *godly* life. This therefore, through the grace of God, shall be my great endeavour for the time to come, to walk worthy of the religion I profess, and of the hopes I have of being happy when I die.'

'I have this day,' saith another, 'been put in mind of a truth which is too little considered by christians, and this is, *that this life is a state of trial;* and that we shall be *happy* or *miserable* when we die, just as we have behaved ourselves *well* or *ill* in this world. I see then that I *may* be happy, if it is not my own fault: and I see too, that I shall certainly be miserable, if I am not careful to lead such a life as may recommend me to the mercy and favour of God. In short, I see plainly, that *now* is the time in which I am to choose what I am to be for ever and ever. I will therefore beg of God, to keep this thought ever in my heart, and to enable me to make such a choice as that I may be happy for ever.'

And you will be better disposed to make such a choice, if you have at any time attended to a sermon of *the great advantage of being* RELIGIOUS. For then you will be convinced, that a firm resolution to be governed, at all times, by the laws of God, is the only sure way to have peace of mind here, and happiness hereafter; for as much as all the commands of God are good, and intended to keep us from ruining ourselves, which we should certainly do if we were left to our own choices: and that the ordinances of the Gospel are necessary to restore us to the favour of God, and serve

SERM. I.

either to cure us of some sad disorder we labour under; or to communicate the divine graces; or to seal to us God's gracious pardon; to direct us in the way we should go; or to keep us from backsliding.

And if to this you add what you can remember to have heard concerning THE REWARD OF SIN, and GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON SINNERS, you will have motives sufficient to determine you what to do; that is, you will conclude, 'I have but one great business in this world, and that is, TO SAVE MY SOUL. This is *that one thing needful* which our Saviour speaks of. If I do not mind this, it is no matter what else I mind; *for he that loses his soul, loses more than the whole world.* This, by the grace of God, I will charge my *memory* and my *heart* with, as long as I live.'

[Luke 10. 42.] [Matt. 16. 26.]

Now, as ever you hope to do so, you must attend to another duty, which you will very often hear pressed upon christians, both in the Holy Scripture and in sermons; and this is, *the duty of being* ALWAYS WATCHFUL, and *upon your guard;* "because our adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," finding them careless, or from under God's protection.

1 Pet. 5. 8.

Upon hearing this, you will do well to make such reflections as these:

'I see that we are beset on all sides with dangers and temptations to sin. We are in danger, from the corruption of our nature, which *is prone to evil continually;* we are in danger of setting our hearts upon this world, and of forgeting that this is not the world we were made for.

'Besides these, Satan has his agents in every place, tempting us to sin of one kind or other. Some to whoredom; some to drunkenness; some to swearing, cursing, lying, or slandering; others to fraud, injustice, or oppression: any one of which will shut me out of heaven, and send me to hell, if I am not careful to avoid them.

'What have I then to do? Why, as I hope for heaven and happiness, I must be serious, and watch against all temptations to evil, and pray to God daily to keep me from sin and wickedness of every kind. And this, by the grace of God, shall be the great business of my life.'

Whoever knows any thing of the Christian Religion, must

know, that SELF-DENIAL is a means of grace, without which no man must hope to be saved. *If any man will come after Me*, saith our Lord and Saviour, *let him deny himself. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off*; that is, part with any thing, though as dear to you as a right hand or a right eye, rather than offend God. [Matt. 16. 24. [Matt. 5. 30.]

It was not the preacher only that said this, but they are the words of Jesus Christ Himself; who said besides, that "it is better to go into life with one hand or one eye, than with two hands or two eyes to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched." [Mark 9. 43—45.]

It is hardly possible for any serious christian to hear this duty explained, and not to think of it even after he leaves the church, and to think thus with himself:

'I see plainly, that I must resolve to *deny myself*, to stand against all my corrupt inclinations, or be content to perish eternally. Whatever evil ways or customs I have hitherto been fond of, I must renounce and forsake them, or I see what must follow. If an *idle* or a *careless life* has been my great sin, though the world sees no great harm in such a life, yet I see I must reform, let it cost me never so much pain and trouble, or I shall infallibly, one day or other, hear that dreadful sentence: *Bind the unprofitable servant hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.* [Matt. 22. 13; 25. 30.]

'If *riches* and the *love of the world* have hitherto possessed my heart, renounce them I must, let it be never so uneasy to me, or my interest in heaven: for *God and mammon I cannot serve*. If any sinful lust or pleasure have got the power over me, and though it is become a second nature, yet I see plainly it must be renounced and forsaken, or I must never hope for heaven. If profane talk, if swearing, lying, or slandering, be the sins that are become habitual to me, and that I cannot without great pains leave them off; yet this pains I must take, or suffer the pains of eternal death. If tippling, if squandering away my time or estate, if gluttony or drunkenness, have been the sins I have lived in, these must be repented of and utterly forsaken, let it be never so uneasy to flesh and blood, or I shall have no part in the kingdom of heaven. [Matt. 6 24.]

'In short, I have been plainly told, and I plainly see, that

SERM. I.

men need not take pains to be ruined, since our own corrupt nature, if not *denied, restrained,* and *kept under,* will ruin us without remedy. I see too, that all the commands of God, all the duties which He has prescribed us, are all intended in mercy to keep us from ruining ourselves. And that if we had been suffered to follow our own wills, or the evil customs we contract, or the bad examples we meet with, we could not escape bringing upon ourselves destruction. I am left, therefore, without excuse, and I shall dearly pay for it, if I do not *deny myself* every thing which God has forbidden me; and if I do not look upon His commands as the only way to life and happiness everlasting.'

Thus every serious christian will argue with himself, whenever he hears any other duty of Christianity explained or recommended to his practice.

If time would permit, I would shew you how this might be done, to your great advantage, in many other instances of duty and religion.

All that I shall now add is, to put you in mind of what a blessing it is, that you have churches to go to, and that you can hear the Word of God, and know His will, and what you must do to be saved.

You see the great blessing of a STANDING MINISTRY, and how happy it is that there are persons appointed by the Holy Ghost, who, *at the peril of their own souls,* are to read, and faithfully to explain, the truths of the Gospel to you.

[1 Cor. 9. 16.]

You may indeed shut your ears, or carelessly think of other matters. You may refuse to hear with attention your duty, and the dangers you are liable to. You may return home without laying these things to heart; but then be assured of it, you return home without God's blessing. You may refuse to come to church (as the manner of some is), and think yourselves too good to be *taught, reproved,* or *put in mind* of your duty; but what will this end in? Why, you will in time forget God, His commands, and all that is good. You will come at last to say, with those wicked people whom Job speaks of, who said unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

Job 21. 14.

I need not tell you, that such people are in the way of damnation.

I pray God keep all you from following their steps; and give us His grace, that we may *hear, understand, remember, consider, love,* and *practise,* what is read and preached to us according to God's holy Word and will, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON II.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE viii. 18.

See Matt. 13. 9; Luke 10. 24; 11. 28; John 15. 12; Heb. 12. 14.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.

WHEN our Lord bids us TAKE HEED, we may be very sure it is concerning something *of great moment,* and therefore to be seriously attended to. And we find it is so here. TAKE HEED, saith He, HOW YE HEAR: your salvation depends upon your understanding and believing what you hear: *for whosoever hath;* that is, whosoever hath benefited by what he has already heard, God will increase his knowledge and his graces; *but whosoever hath not,* have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it, such careless people, by a just judgment of God, shall lose that knowledge and those graces which He had given them.

TAKE HEED, therefore, that you hear the Word of God with a *serious mind,* with a purpose and desire to learn your duty, and with a resolution to practise what you hear.

Lastly, TAKE HEED WHOM YOU HEAR: remember whose *ministers* you hear, whose *word,* whose *commands,* whose *threatenings,* whose *promises,* you hear. They are the ministers of God *that watch for your souls.* [Heb. 13. 17.] They read and preach to you the *Word* of God, delivered by His own Son. They explain to you the *commands* of God, which are designed to make you happy for ever. And they put you in remembrance of the *promises* of God, if you are obedient; and of His *severe threatenings,* if you despise His goodness. Remember, therefore, what the Son of God said to those that heard this Word, and would not mind it: [Matt. 10. 15.] "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such careless people."

But having, in a former discourse upon these words, explained these things very particularly, I now proceed to shew you *the true way of profiting by sermons,* many instances of which I gave you in my former discourse.

Let us suppose, then, that the minister of God has at any time been explaining to you *the nature of a true Christian Faith; the necessity of believing whatever God has made known to men;* as also *the danger of not living as becomes people who profess to believe such things.*

If you have seriously attended to such a discourse, you will think thus with yourself: 'I am now convinced, *that without Faith it is impossible to please God.* I see plainly, that it is not a matter of indifference, whether we believe or not, since Jesus Christ Himself has declared, *that he that believeth not shall be damned;* and that it is as absolutely necessary to salvation that we believe—not what we please, but—*according to the faith once delivered to the Saints.* [Heb.11.6.] [Mark 16. 16.] [Jude ver. 3.]

'Our Lord Himself has told us, *that if we believe not in Him, we shall die in our sins.* And again: *He that sinneth against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven.* So dreadful a thing it is not to know, or wilfully to mistake, the truth. [John 8. 24.] [Matt. 12. 31.]

'Whatever, therefore, God has revealed, must be true and certain, though I cannot comprehend it. It is not necessary that we should always know the reasons of God's will and pleasure; it is enough that we know it to be His will. It is sufficient to me to know and believe, that God would have all men to be saved; that Jesus Christ His Son has shewed unto us the way of salvation; that He has reconciled us to God; that He will be our advocate with God for our pardon, if we truly repent us of our sins; that God will afford us all manner of assistance by His Spirit, to overcome all the corruptions of our nature, and all the difficulties we shall meet with; that He will make us happy for ever, if we strive to please Him during this short life; and that we shall be most miserable when we die, if we die in our sins unrepented of.

'In order to prevent this sad doom, He has made known to us, what are the things which we must do to be saved, and what we must avoid, as ever we hope to escape the bitter pains of eternal death. He has also made known to us, that

SERM. II.

all things are naked and open unto His eyes, that we may live as having Him the constant witness of our words and actions. I must not, therefore, deceive myself, nor fancy, that if I should be so unhappy as not to believe, or not to mind these things, that therefore I have no reason to fear what will follow: for God's Word will come to pass, though all the world should not mind it.

'I see, therefore, how necessary it is to have the articles of my Christian Faith in my memory, and before my eyes continually; and to beg of God daily to increase my faith. I will read or hear God's Word with reverence, and endeavour to lay up in my heart what I hear and understand. And, knowing that faith is the gift of God, I will not fail to ask it of God with all the earnestness of my soul; for I have been told, and do believe, that the most learned man on earth cannot convince or convert me, unless I attend to the Word spoken, and ponder it in my heart, and beg of God to enlighten my mind.

'I will not be afraid to ask myself this short question, *Do I live by faith?* that is, does the fear of God hinder me from doing what I know will displease Him? Do the promises of God affect my heart, and make me desirous to be made worthy to obtain them? Do the judgments of God upon wicked people, which are recorded in the Holy Scriptures, make me take warning, and fear to draw down the like judgments upon myself? Have I a just value for the Christian Religion, and its ordinances and ministers, and for whatever has any relation to God? Have I a love for the Gospel, and for the truths contained in it; and do I resolve to govern myself according to them? Do I consider what a dreadful thing it is for a christian so to live as if not one word of the Gospel were true? Do I hate sin as most displeasing to God, and hurtful to my own salvation? Do I distrust myself and my own strength, and put my whole trust and confidence in God? Do I constantly pray for His grace to increase my faith, and that I may be able to live as becomes my profession? If I do this in the sincerity of my heart, then I may be assured that I live by faith; and that I have a principle of a new life, which, if I do not stifle it, will in the end bring me to everlasting life and happiness.'

These, I say, will (through the blessing of God) be the fruits; these, or such like, will be the observations and resolutions which a serious christian will make, who has carefully minded what has at any time been said upon the subject of faith.

Let us, in the next place, suppose, that you have heard a sermon concerning THE LOVE OF GOD. The love of God being *the first and great command;* it would be unpardonable for a christian to hear a sermon upon that subject without minding it, and without being bettered by it. [Matt. 22. 36—38.]

I will endeavour to shew you how you may be truly edified by such a discourse, if you have seriously attended to it. You will, in the first place, have been put in mind, that God is worthy of your greatest love, and that He may justly require it of you, that you love Him above all things; because He made you, and it is He who by His providence preserves you every day of your life, and who is the giver of all the blessings you either enjoy or hope for. Besides this, He intends, out of His infinite goodness, to make you happy for ever, if it is not your own fault. And though you know in your conscience, that you have grievously offended God, yet He is ready to pardon you upon your sincere repentance. And to convince you of this, after the most kind and gracious manner, He sent His beloved Son from heaven to assure us thereof, and of His GOOD-WILL TO MEN: by Him proposing terms of pardon and mercy upon most reasonable conditions, and eternal happiness upon performing them. [Luke 2. 14.]

His Son also procured for us this great favour, that we might apply to God, *as to a father,* in all our necessities; for whatever we want in all our troubles: and this with confidence that He would hear us with the tenderness of a father.

Besides this, you will have been instructed what it is TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. That it is, to desire and to strive to please God in all your actions. To have a great regard to His laws; to what He has commanded, and to what He has forbidden. To love His *Word,* in which His will is made known to us; and His *ministers,* who are by Him appointed to instruct you, and to watch for your souls as they that must give an account. It is to speak of God after the most respectful manner, that others may learn by your ex-

SERM. II.

ample to love and reverence Him. It is to be pleased and rejoice when God is honoured; when things go as God would have them; when justice, piety, and charity, do thrive and are encouraged; and to be grieved, when God's laws are transgressed, neglected, or despised. Lastly, it is to submit to God's will, and what He orders for you; and to suffer any thing, rather than knowingly and wilfully to offend God; and to deny yourself every thing which you have reason to believe will displease Him.

Having heard all this with seriousness and attention, you cannot but come to some such resolutions as these following:

'I see plainly, that I can have no security, no real satisfaction in life, until I can bring my heart to love God sincerely. In order to this, I will often call to mind the many blessings which I have received from God, that I may give Him thanks for them: the surest way to increase my love for Him who has been so good and kind to me. I will read or hear His *Holy Word* with care, that I may know His *will*, His *promises*, and the great reward He has proposed to His faithful servants. I will abhor and avoid all such persons, principles, company, and conversation, as may lessen my esteem for and love of God. I will not let the love of the world possess my heart, lest I forget God, and forget that He is my only good. And because love amongst friends is soon lost for want of conversing with one another, I will go to God daily, and lay my wants and my desires before Him: particularly, I will beg of God to pour into my heart such love towards Him, that I may love Him above all things, and that His love may be the commanding principle of my life.'

These, I say, or some such, will be the thoughts and resolutions of every sober christian, who has attended to a sermon concerning *the Love of God*. And he will be more careful to put these resolutions in practice, when he considers, that such as do not love God, do really hate God (as monstrous a sin as that is); that is, they wish that there were no such a being to call them to account for their wicked deeds. And they are pleased with such men, and such arguments, as tend to lessen their belief of a future state, and a future account. So dreadful is the sin of hating (that is, of not loving) God.

We will suppose again, that you had been instructed in the meaning and importance of *the second great command*, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF. It is probable you will have been put in mind of the great stress that is laid upon this command by Christ Himself: "This commandment have we from Him; that he who loveth God, love his brother also." From which you will conclude, that nothing can more effectually recommend you to the favour of God, than a *love for your neighbour*; since God has placed this duty the very next to the love we owe to Himself. You will be careful therefore to remember, what you have learned from Christ Himself as well as from His ministers, *whom* you are to account your neighbour, and how you are to shew your love to him.

[Matt. 22. 39.]

John 4. 21.

You will remember, that every man is your neighbour and your brother, who may be benefited by your love. That God is our common father, and that all we are brethren. That we are all members of the same body, of which Jesus Christ is the head. That God has so ordered matters, that the members of this body should depend one upon another. That the poor shall depend upon the rich for their subsistence; and the rich, whatever they think of it, shall receive a greater advantage from the prayers of the poor. You will then call to mind how you are to express your love to your neighbour. The command says, YOU ARE TO LOVE HIM AS YOURSELF. You know, without a teacher, how you love yourself. That you wish and take satisfaction in your own welfare and prosperity. That you are sorry, when any evil or mischief befalls yourself. You do not love to have your own faults aggravated, or your good name abused; and how ready you are to find excuses for your own mistakes. In short, you know very well how you would have others to shew their love for you. And that it is no small comfort for the ignorant and unlearned, that their duty is contained in so few words; and that they can easily understand it, by considering how they love, how they would be dealt with themselves.

These things considered, you will, if you have any grace in your heart, come to some such resolutions as these following:

'I see that I am bound as a christian, and at the peril of

SERM. II.

my soul, to be just to, to forgive, and give to, and love, and pray for, my neighbour, as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. I will therefore do no wrong to any man, though I could hope to be never so great a gainer by it. I will not oppress, over-reach, vex, or harass others, though it should be in my power. I will not envy my neighbour's prosperity, nor bear malice in my heart, though I could never so well conceal it. I will despise no man living for the meanness of his condition, or for the misfortunes that may have befallen him; knowing very well, that we are all subject to misfortunes, to failings, to every thing that may make a man contemptible. I will be ready to do good with what God has blessed me, and even glad to communicate, knowing that with such sacrifices God is pleased. I will not render evil for evil, though revenge is sweet to flesh and blood. If any man is my enemy without cause, I will pray that God would convert him; that He will restrain and keep him from evil and mischief, which otherwise will be the greatest injury to himself. I will not say, that my neighbour does not deserve my love; for if God should deal with me according to my deserts, I should be the most miserable creature alive. I will not dare to say, such a man has injured me, and I will not forgive him; because God Himself has declared, that just so *He* will deal with me. I will bear with the infirmities of others, hoping that others, and especially God Himself, will bear with mine. I will thus endeavour to express my love to my neighbour, out of love to God, who has commanded me so to do; and because I believe it will be most acceptable to the Divine Majesty. And I will beg of God to give me the spirit of love; and that the love of God, and of my neighbour, may be the commanding principle of my life. And, that every night of my life, I may lie down to sleep with the same charitable dispositions with which I desire and hope to die.'

This will be the *true way* OF PROFITING BY SERMONS, and you will return home from God's house with a blessing.

We will suppose, in the next place, that you had been instructed by God's minister, concerning *the necessity, the indispensable necessity, of* AN HOLY LIFE. You would not, sure, go home, and think no more upon a subject, which it so much

concerns you to remember. For you will have been assured by the Spirit of God, as well as by the minister of God, THAT WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD. [Heb. 12. 14.] That the design of all the laws and ordinances of God is, *to make you partaker of a divine nature*; [2 Pet. 1. 4.] that is, to make you holy, that you may be capable of being happy. And that we are heirs of salvation on no other terms but *these;* that we study to please God in the whole course of our lives; and that we must not satisfy ourselves with the outward duties of religion; which are of no value in the sight of God, if they do not help to free us from the slavery of sin, and restore us to the image of God.

And, to oblige you not to be indifferent in a matter of so great concern, you will remember, that you have been often told, how very different the portion of good and bad men is *sure* to be in the next world. And that if you make God your enemy by an unholy life, you are for ever undone.

You will then begin to think it worth your while to call to mind, in what, as you have been often told, this holiness consists. That it is not confined to the time you are at church, or at your prayers; but that it must be the work of your whole life. That you must be holy in your *conversation,* that is, inoffensive and exemplary. Holy in your *dealings,* that is, just and conscientious. Holy with regard to God, reverencing every thing that belongs to Him, hearing His Word, resolving to be governed by His commands; praying to Him for what you want, and praising Him for His mercies. That you must be holy with respect to your *neighbour;* that is, you must do him no mischief; you must relieve him in his necessities; you must pray for him; and forgive him, if he has injured you. Lastly, that you must be holy in what relates to *yourself;* holy in your *devotions,* that is, sincere and without hypocrisy; holy in repenting when you have done amiss, and returning to your duty without delay; holy in moderating your affections for this world, that you may LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. You must be holy in *prosperity,* that is, not high-minded; holy in *adversity,* that is, patient and resigned to the will of God. You must be holy in your *apparel,* modest and free from pride and vanity; holy in your *diet,* not given to intemperance,

SERM. II. to gluttony, or drunkenness; holy in your *diversions*, not making them the great business of your life.

If you are a *parent*, you must express your holiness in bringing up your children in the fear of God; if a *master*, you must be holy, that is, just to your servants, remember-
[Col. 4. 1.] ing that you yourself *have a master in heaven*.

In short, you will have been told, that nothing ought to discourage you from being as holy as possibly you *can* be; because God, who requires you to be holy, has obliged Himself to assist you with sufficient grace and power; and because the more holy you are, the more happy you are sure to be when you die.

Now, if you have pondered these things in your heart, you cannot but come to some such resolutions as these following:

'I am now convinced, that the manner of my life is the only proof of my being in the favour or under the displeasure of God. That to lead a careless, thoughtless, or a useless life, will certainly bring upon me the sentence of the
[Luke13.7.] fruitless tree: *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* I will therefore endeavour to please God, by being as careful of my ways, and as obedient to His commands, as His grace shall enable me to be. And since He is so good as to allow me to call Him *my father*, I will endeavour to lead such a life as becomes the child of so holy a father. To this end, I will endeavour to understand what the will of God is, and will compare my life with those rules He has given me to walk by, that I may be satisfied whether I am, in truth, in the way of holiness or not.

'I will not delude myself with saying, that every man has his faults, and that God is merciful: for I understand He is *just* as well as *merciful;* that He hates sin in every body; and that if my faults are such as He hates, and has forbidden, and I continue in them, I shall provoke Him to deny me the benefit of His mercy, and shall feel the severity of His justice. I will not therefore, as I love my own soul, live in any known sin, but will keep a strict watch over my heart and actions, and deny myself, and part with, any pleasure rather than displease God. Nor will I flatter myself with vain hopes, that I may get habits of holiness hereafter, and before

I die; for if I think it too soon to please God *now*, He may be provoked to deny me His grace, and then I shall never be holy, never happy.

'And because good purposes, without a change of life, will signify nothing but to condemn me, I will therefore beg of God to touch my heart most powerfully from above, that I may not only *resolve*, but *do*, what He would have me.'

Such resolutions as these, every christian should make, when he hears the Word of God read or preached. And indeed, it is plainly for want of minding the things they hear, and for want of pondering them in their hearts, that christians are so *careless*, so *ignorant*, and so *wicked*. And those very people, who would not for the world deny their religion, or give up their hopes of heaven, are yet in danger of never going to heaven, because they would not hear with attention their duty nor their danger, nor ponder them in their hearts.

People do not consider, that want of learning will be no excuse, in a christian country, for their being ignorant of their duty. Such as will attend the church, and pray for God's grace, and hear His Word with a serious and devout temper, and practise what they know, are in as sure a way of happiness as the most learned. *Take heed, therefore, how ye hear:* and if you would indeed profit by hearing, and carry a blessing home with you, imprint upon your hearts some such truths as these:

'This is God's minister: what he delivers is God's Word. I mind attentively my betters when they speak to me, and I lay it up in my heart: and shall I forget what my Maker has said, as soon as I am got from His presence? God forbid. I will rather go home, and consider with myself what use I ought to make of what I have heard, and will order my life accordingly.'

Do so; and God will increase your knowledge and your graces. And the word which you hear will become indeed the word of salvation (as St. Paul calls it) to every one that believeth, and so receives it.

And may our blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in

SERM. II. such wise *hear, mark, learn,* and inwardly *digest* them, that by patience and comfort of His holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which He has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.

SERMON III.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

VOUCHSAFE, O Lord, to direct me, and bless this discourse for the good of my flock: that they may glorify Thee for the truths they shall hear, and for the blessings they shall receive, by the ministry of the most unworthy of Thy servants, O Sovereign Pastor! Amen.

LUKE viii. 18.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have. See Amos 8. 11; Matt. 18. 14; Heb. 2. 1, 2, &c.; 1 Thess. 2. 13; 4. 1; James 1. 21.

I HAVE already, in a former discourse, explained to you what our Lord means by this earnest caution; namely, to assure us, that according to the measure of our *love* for God's Word, our *attention* in hearing it, and our *care* to profit by it, shall be the measure of grace which God will give us.

I have already shewed you the danger of living under the light of the Gospel, and not being bettered by it: our Saviour says expressly, "that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such people:" because the word which you hear is "not the word of men, but in truth the Word of God." [Matt. 10. 15.] [1 Thess. 2. 13.]

This is My beloved Son, saith God, *hear ye Him.* And it is *His* Gospel we preach, we explain, we press upon you. It is HIM you despise, when you mind not what is said to you by *His* ministers. [Mark 9. 7.]

And, on the other hand, when you come to church with a serious, teachable temper, and hear His Word with reverence and submission, you do most certainly engage Him to enlighten your minds with saving truth.

SERM. III.

It was for this reason I proposed to shew you THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS; by shewing you how every christian *ought* and *may* most profitably apply the things he hears to himself, and form such resolutions as are most likely to influence his practice. I have already done this on several practical subjects, such as most nearly concern a christian life; and shall now proceed to others of like importance.

Let us then suppose, that you have heard a discourse concerning THE DANGER OF KEEPING BAD COMPANY; *of conversing with people of wicked principles or wicked lives.*

To be sure, you will have been put in mind, how many have been ruined by an unwise choice of such companions; how many have got habits of idleness, of intemperance, of trifling away their time and their estates; have been strangely corrupted both in their principles and in their manners.

You will, with great truth, have been assured, that in all companies where men make a mock of sin, speak lightly of God, and profanely of any thing that belongs to Him; *there* Satan infallibly governs, inspires his agents, and more or less infects all that are present. That you will in time be content to hear the most serious things made a jest of, and to wish inwardly that the things you were taught to believe were not true, and that there was no God to call you to an account.

You do not know but the company you are fond of are atheists, men under the government of Satan; if you live as they do, you will in time believe as they do, whatever at present you may think of it.

You will have been assured, that nothing more provokes God to deprive men of His Holy Spirit, and of His graces, than the frequenting of wicked company, where things hateful to God are said and done.

Lastly, you will have heard from the inspired writer, that [Hos. 4. 11.] *wine, and new wine, take away the heart;* that is, the understanding: and every one, who is given to drinking and company, will find it so to his sorrow, when it may be too late to return to a sober mind; sad experience convincing us, that one need but taste a sinful pleasure, or frequent bad

company a very little while, to be very fond of them, and a slave to them.

If I should observe any young person very serious and attentive when he hears these truths, I should conclude that such a person will make some such reflections as these following:

'I thank God that I have had this fair warning given me. I am convinced that bad company has cost many a man very dear. I have within me the same seeds of wickedness with other people; and if God leaves me to my own choices, and I make choice of bad company, I shall be as wicked as the worst of them; my heart will be infected, my faith weakened, my good purposes cooled, and all my graces injured. I am convinced of the difficulty of getting out of the snare, and of breaking off evil habits; and that if I provoke God to withdraw His Spirit, I never can repent, never can return to a sober mind. I will therefore keep in my mind the words of the Apostle, *Evil communications corrupt good manners;* [1 Cor. 15. 33.] and I am resolved, by the grace of God, to avoid, as I would do the devil, the company of all such by whose loose principles and lewd examples my faith may be corrupted, or my morals endangered.'

I persuade myself, that all young persons, who have any grace left, will make some such resolutions as these, and will beg of God the grace to keep them.

How many discourses have christians heard concerning another reigning vice, THE SINS OF IMPURITY, FORNICATION, AND UNCLEANNESS, without being bettered by what either God or His ministers have said upon those subjects. They have heard, for instance, God's express declaration, "that whoremongers and adulterers God will judge; that they shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." [Heb. 13. 4; Rev. 21. 8.] That God abhors such as fall into these sins, and do not immediately repent and forsake them.

They have as often been put in mind of the difficulty of forsaking these sins; because these sins do blind the understanding, waste and harden the conscience, blot out all good purposes, grieve the Spirit of God, drive Him from them, and give the devil the greatest power over those that live in them. They see with their own eyes, the pains people take

SERM. III.

to conceal these vices; which should convince christians how shameful they really are. And they have often heard what [Eph. 5. 3.] St. Paul has said of these sins: "that they are such as should not so much as be named among christians."

Lastly, christians know that God has appointed LAWFUL MARRIAGE as a means to prevent these sins, so hateful to God, and so destructive to men. And yet this unclean spirit reigns in the world without control; very many fall into these sins, many live in them, and too many make a jest of them.

What can be the reason of this? Why, christians, when they hear these things, do not mind them; they do not think of them after they leave the church; they do not ponder them in their hearts.

Young people, when they hear these things, should ask themselves some such questions as these:

'Do I really believe, that, by falling into these sins, I shall lose the favour of God, and must expect a most fearful judgment if I continue in them? I dare not say I do not believe this: and if I do believe these truths, my crime will admit of no excuse; I shall be self-condemned, and lost irrecoverably, and ruined for ever, if I go on and continue in such sins as these. I will not flatter myself that God will be merciful to me, though I continue in sin; He was the same merciful God who, for these sins, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven. I am to judge, by this, of God's mercy when it is abused. I will not venture upon these sins in hopes of repenting before I die; for at the best I can but repent for myself; I cannot repent for those I shall corrupt, whose blood shall be required at my hands. I will not make myself easy, because I may hope to hide my crimes; for I am assured, that God will bring to light the hidden works of darkness, when the stoutest, hardest heart shall be ashamed and made to tremble. I will therefore endeavour to imprint these terrors upon my heart, and preserve my innocence, as I love my own soul. I will avoid, as much as I can, all temptations to these sins; idleness, intemperance; all company that make a jest of these crimes; all people that have lost their modesty; all whom the devil has inspired with immodest stories, filthy discourse, lewd

songs; in short, all that discover, by their idle talk and wanton behaviour, that they only want to be tempted, that they only want an occasion, to be lewd.'

If the devil, as be sure he will, lays a temptation in my way, a young man, who has any grace left, will say, in the words of Joseph, on the like occasion, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" [Gen. 39. 9.]

A woman, who has not quite lost her modesty, will, on the like occasion, argue with herself in the words of Tamar, David's daughter: "I, whither shall I make my shame to go," if I consent to this foul crime? [2 Sam. 13. 13.]

And, knowing that I have not the power of resisting temptations in my own hands, I will pray to God, every day of my life, to give me grace and strength to resist all temptations, which will cost me so very dear.

And such as have been so unhappy as to have fallen into these sins will repent forthwith, and be very watchful for the time to come, if they will but think seriously of the words of Christ; "that the unclean spirit will return with seven others more wicked than himself:" and then what destruction will they make! [Luke 11. 26.]

These are the reflections that Christians should make, and will make, if they have any grace, when they hear a discourse of *the dreadful consequence of sins of impurity*.

There is another very great and very common sin, very little minded; however, I would beg you would lay to heart both the *guilt* and the *curse* that attends it. It is *the sin of profaning* THE NAME OF GOD *to idle or wicked purposes*.

This is done every day, without fear and without thought; though it is a sin most displeasing to God, for which He will not hold men guiltless; that is, He will punish them in an extraordinary manner: because the impious custom *of swearing in common conversation* strikes directly at the honour of God; it makes His *name*, that is, God Himself, contemptible; it lessens men's esteem and reverence for Him that made them; and treats Him as an idol, which can do them neither good nor hurt. By this impious custom, men come to lose the fear of an oath; so that oaths and vows are no manner of rule by which we can judge whether they speak true or false. From common swearing they come to cursing

SERM. III.

themselves and others; from cursing, to blasphemy; and from blasphemy, to downright atheism; to say, at least to wish, that there was no God.

You will therefore, when you hear these things, as ever you hope to escape the vengeance of God; you will lay these truths to heart, and resolve with yourself as follows:

'I will always endeavour to speak of God with an awe and reverence upon my mind. If I am called to take a *solemn oath*, I will consider the meaning and terror of those words with which it is bound upon me, so HELP YOU GOD! and then I shall conclude, that as ever I expect the help of God when I shall most want it, I am bound to speak the very truth. As for *rash, customary oaths*, I will abhor the appealing to God, as every man does who swears, with a lie or a trifle in my mouth. If ever I shall be so unhappy as to be surprised into such a sin, I will immediately beg God's pardon, and resolve to do so no more. And lest such oaths should become less dreadful to me, and more familiar, I will avoid, as I would do the devil, or leave the company of, a man who is given to such vices, lest I should provoke God to leave me to myself, and lest I should become as bad as the worst.

'That I may not take the name of God in vain, when I am at my prayers, and worshipping Him, I will endeavour that my words and heart shall go together. To this end, I will consider, that all the prayers of the Church begin with such expressions as are most proper to make us mind to whom we speak; that it is, *to an Almighty God, and merciful Father, to Whom all hearts are open, all desires known; Who is the fountain of all wisdom and goodness, the creator and preserver of mankind; Whose nature and property is always to have mercy and to forgive.*'

These, and such expressions, if attended to, will call back a roving mind, and fix it upon the duty you are about; will awaken the most careless, and melt down the most stubborn heart.

Whoever comes to these resolutions, which all people will do who are afraid *to take God's name in vain*, will not often speak *of* God, or *to* God, without *thought*, without *reason*, and without *reverence*.

The next great sin to this is that of PROFANING THE LORD'S

DAY. You hear the command of God touching this sin, and your duty, every such day. And you hear your duty often pressed upon you in sermons; and too often you return home *without profiting by the one or the other.*

Do but consider the reason of this: why, you do not seriously attend to what you hear; or you forget it as soon as you leave the church; or you do not apply the truths you hear to yourself, or come to any sober resolutions concerning them. For is it possible that you should hear and believe that God has expressly commanded one day in seven to be kept holy? That *He hath blessed that day;* that is, He has joined an especial blessing to the due observation of it. That it is a day dedicated to the honour and worship of God, and of Jesus Christ our Saviour. That if men were not on these days put in mind of the duty they owe to God; and if certain persons were not by His command appointed to keep up the knowledge of God, and of our dependance upon Him, we should soon lose the knowledge of the true God (as many nations have done), all sense of piety, all concern for what *must* come hereafter, whether men know, whether they think of it or not. And lastly, that such as do not KEEP THIS DAY HOLY, by going to the assemblies of the faithful, do, in effect, excommunicate themselves. [Exod. 20. 11.]

Is it possible, I say, that a Christian, when he is put in mind of these truths, should not come to some such firm resolutions as these:

'I will consider who it is that has given me this command: that it is He Who gives me all my time, and Who blesseth all my labours. I will consider what it is He has commanded me: why, that I should, for one day in seven, leave all my worldly cares and concerns in His hands, Whose blessing upon one day's labour is of more value than the whole week's work without it: and that I should dedicate this day to His honour; to give Him thanks for His care over me; to acknowledge and adore His infinite perfections, His *power,* His *wisdom,* His *goodness,* His *truth,* and His *justice.* And lastly, to acknowledge my own misery, without His blessing: and that I am subject to *ignorance,* to *want,* to *troubles,* to *sickness,* to *sin,* and to *death,* even to *death eternal.*

'I will therefore resolve, as ever I hope for a blessing in

SERM. III.

this life, or for happiness in the next, I WILL REMEMBER THE LORD'S DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY. I will go to the house of God, and confess my own unworthiness, and His infinite goodness. I will appear before God, with my *heart* as well as with my *body*. I will confess my sins unto God, and hope for a share in the absolution pronounced by His minister in His name. I will attend to His Word, and say a *serious Amen* to the graces and blessings there prayed for: and I will receive, with the greatest devotion, THE SOLEMN BLESSING of the priest of God, by which he dismisseth the congregation; because I have the sure promise of God Himself, that His blessing shall attend the blessing pronounced by His priest.

Num. 6. 23, &c.

'I will then return home, and consider seriously what I have heard, and then I will lay all my own particular wants before the throne of grace. I will consider, that it is God's *own day;* that it is the day of giving *pardon* to sinners; of giving *grace* to the humble; of giving *comfort* to the afflicted; of giving *strength* to the weak; of giving *blessings* to all that call upon Him in sincerity.

'And lastly, I will pray God to deliver me from all those ways by which this good day is generally profaned. Nor will I spend that time in *idleness*, in *sloth*, in *trifling*, with a careless indifference, which is consecrated to the honour of God, and designed to prepare me for an eternal rest hereafter.'

Make such resolutions as these, when you hear this duty recommended and explained; and depend upon God for His blessing upon them.

When one considers what steps people take from one sin to another, till they become very often both *hardened* and *reprobate;* one must conclude, that such people never seriously attended to what the Scriptures have told us concerning the DECEITFULNESS OF SIN. "That if men will not retain God in their knowledge, God will give them up to a mind void of judgment; to work all iniquity with greediness."

[Rom. 1. 28; Eph. 4. 19.]

That this has been the case of an infinite number of people, who have fallen into crimes and courses, which once in their lives they abhorred the thoughts of: that the most profligate sinners did once hate those vices they now are so

fond of; and were afraid of that God, Whose threats and judgments they *now* never mind, or fear: that most people, before they were corrupted, did blush, and start, and were ashamed of doing a base, or an unworthy thing, which *now* never disturbs them: that when men have once lost the fear of God, they will do what pleaseth themselves, though all the world sees their folly, and what their end will be: and that there is no wickedness which can be named, which such people have not at last fallen into: we have very many scripture examples which confirm this truth.

A Prince, beloved of God, but giving way to his lusts, [2 Sam. 11.] first corrupts the wife, and then murders her husband. His son, by the same steps, falling into gross and senseless [1 Kings 11.] idolatry.

Another great man asking the Prophet, "Am I a dog, [2 Kings 8. 13; 10. 32.] to do such things as you say I shall one day come to do?" Which yet he afterwards did without scruple.

By these instances you should be convinced, that neither the greatest wisdom, nor the best education, nor the greatest favours of God, nor the good opinion we may have of our own sense and resolutions, can secure us, when once we give way to our own appetites to do what God has forbidden.

You see a *common swearer*. You think little of it. You esteem it a frailty only. You do not see the end of this sin; that it leads to impiety, to perjury, to atheism, and damnation.

You see a *tippler*, or a *drunkard*. The sin is so common you mind it not. You do not see the end of it; his family and his affairs are neglected; God, and religion, and his soul, are the least of his thoughts or concern; he grows sottish and thoughtless, contracts distempers, and dies hard, or in despair.

You see another given to *lewd, filthy*, or *profane talk*. You laugh with him, and see no harm in it. You would tremble, if you could see what this leads to. He grows debauched, becomes fearless of offending God, hardened in wickedness and infidelity, and is taken off in his sin. This does not affect you, because you are yet alive.

If people will despise the Lord's day; neglect the ordi-

SERM. III.

nances; refuse to hear God's Word, or to know His will; He will withdraw His graces, they will grow more careless, and at last professedly wicked, and ripe for judgment.

You have often heard what St. Paul observes, that INFIDELITY, *the not retaining God in their knowledge*, was the occasion of the vilest sins that ever were thought of. You may be assured of it, the same cause will, at all times, have the same dreadful effects. [Rom. 1. 28.]

In short, the beginning of sin is not regarded; but one evil habit certainly begets another, till men forget God; till God forsakes them, and leaves them to themselves; till they have filled up the measure of their sins; and till God sends upon them swift destruction.

Well then; will you hear such truths as these without profiting by them? Can you possibly leave the church without coming to some such reflections and resolutions as these following:

'I see plainly, that human nature is the same, and extremely corrupt in all men: that without the grace of God we can do no good thing: that if by my sins I should grieve the Spirit of God, and force Him to leave me to myself, I cannot foresee what I shall do; what I shall be; what doom I shall bring upon myself. I am convinced, that if I desire to avoid the greater sins, I must resolve to resist the very beginning of sin, the very least thing that I believe will displease God; and that if I do not do so, and get once out of God's way, one sin will infallibly lead to another. I see what blindness, what wickedness, sinners have been capable of, when once they have been left to themselves: that they could neither *think*, nor *act*, nor *live*, like men that had reason. I will endeavour (will every serious Christian say) I will live in the fear of God, that I may never consent to known iniquity. This is the only security against the greatest crimes: to be afraid of those judgments which He has threatened to sinners, and of those ways which He has assured us will be our ruin. I will not, therefore, go against my conscience in the least thing whatever; being thoroughly convinced, that I cannot take up when I please. I see the danger of continuing in any known sin: if therefore I shall be so unhappy as to fall into sin, I will follow the example

of holy David: *I made haste*, said he, *and delayed not, to keep Thy commandments.* [Ps. 119. 60.] And I will walk humbly before God, knowing that I have nothing of my own to boast of; neither my own reason, nor my own strength, nor my best resolutions, will secure me from falling into sin, without the help of God.

'I have the comfort of knowing, that while I fear to *offend*, and sincerely desire to *please* God, I shall be under the protection of His good providence: He will give His holy Angels charge concerning me; He will inspire me with a dread of such things as would hurt me; support me under temptations; correct me when I am going wrong; awaken my conscience; lay restraints upon my passions; and keep me from such sins as are the ruin of those that forget God. In short, the wrath of God is, in the Gospel of Christ, so plainly revealed against all that live wickedly, that all such as do so will (to make their minds easy) either repent and forsake their sins, or strive to blot the knowledge of God out of their minds, and turn infidels. For fear, therefore, of falling into that most dreadful judgment, I will resolve, by the grace of God, not to live in any known sin, lest in time I become an atheist.'

These are the resolutions, or some such as these, that you should make when you hear a sermon concerning *the deceitfulness of sin, and the steps sinners take to their ruin.* [Heb. 3. 13.

Christians must never hope to escape falling into sins of every kind, who do not seriously attend to what God has made known to us concerning *the nature of* TEMPTATIONS *and* TRIALS, *and the way not to be hurt by them.*

They are charged, as they value their souls, to watch against temptations, and to pray continually, that they may not fall into or be overcome by them. They are assured, by the Spirit of God, that the devil is perpetually seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, and from under God's protection. They are put in mind of their own frailty, that they may look up to God perpetually, and depend upon His grace. They are over and over again told, that there is no condition of life but what is subject to temptations: that every man living has reason to be upon his guard against the wiles of the devil, since he had power to prevail with

SERM. III.

Judas to betray the Son of God Himself, with the chief of God's priests to accuse Him most wrongfully, and with Pilate to condemn Him against his conscience. They have the example of our first parents, to convince them how weak they are, and what *will* be the effects of giving way to the suggestions of the devil. They see, every day, christians who have vowed to renounce the *devil*, the *world*, and the *lusts of the flesh*, as much led by them as the very heathens.

These things, one should hope, might awaken christians, and *make them fly from the wrath to come;* but, God knows, it is too often that they are never minded.

Christians hear them with *indifference;* they leave the church, and "Satan cometh immediately, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." They meet with temptations at every turn; and are drawn away either by their *lusts*, or by *evil examples*, and are in the direct way of ruin.

[Luke 8. 12.]

Why now, what do people come to church for; but to be put in mind of these things, that they may lay them up in their hearts; and that they may, in good earnest, pray *to be delivered from evil?*

Let us beseech you, therefore, good christians, when you hear such truths as these, ponder them in your hearts, and come to some resolutions about them.

Say to yourselves, 'I have this day been told (what I hope I shall not forget), that I have a watchful enemy to deal with; that I have a very corrupt heart, too ready to yield to his suggestions; and that I have bad examples, too many, to lead me astray, and to my ruin. I dare not, therefore, presume upon my own strength, upon my own wisdom, or conduct; *but my whole trust shall be in God.* I will most earnestly beg of Him not to leave me to my own choices, but to discover to me the dangers I am liable to, and that He will enable me to *resist* and overcome them. I have been assured, *that God's grace is sufficient*, and therefore I will neither despair nor be dejected. I will never run into the temptations which, in my daily prayers, I pray God I may not be led into. I will remember the Word of God: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Neither will I hearken unto the suggestions of the devil, but

[2Cor.12.9.]

[1 Cor. 10. 12.]

RESIST HIM (as I am exhorted by the Apostle); and then I [James 4.7.] am assured, *that he cannot get an advantage over me.* I will consider who it is that puts me upon forbidden things: that it is the same Satan who said to our Saviour, *All these things* [Matt. 4. 9.] *will I give Thee:* that it is the same evil spirit, or his angels, who suggests to me; *that* pleasure will not hurt you; *that* revenge is sweet; *that* gain, *those* riches, will make you happy.'

It is the same spirit that would make you believe, that there is no hurt in an idle, useless life; that there is no harm in spending your estate or your time; that they are your own, and you may do what you please with them. It is the same Satan, that tempts you to neglect the worship of God, and to think it a burden; that persuades you to believe, that you have time enough to repent in, and to lead a new life; and that in the mean time you may follow the desires of your own heart. Lastly, it is the same evil spirit, who, when you purpose to lead a new life, and forget your good purposes; it is the same spirit that takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, in order to make your condition more desperate.

You will consider, therefore, what you lose by not attending to, and profiting by, God's Word; by not pondering it in your heart; and by not resolving to be governed by it: that is, you are like to lose your soul.

God deliver us all from such negligence and blindness; and give us grace to *hear,* and *attend* to, and *remember,* and *profit* by, His holy Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.

SERMON IV.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE viii. 18.

Ezek. 12. 2; Hosea 8. 12; Matt. 13. 14; Luke 6. 47; John 12. 48; Acts 3. 23; James 1. 21, 22.

Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.

I HAVE already considered these words, and this warning, of our Lord; as also the great hazard christians run, who live under the ordinances of the Gospel, and do not profit by them.

If it is a great misfortune not to know the Gospel (as most sure it is), it is a much greater, to hear and to know the truths of the Gospel, and not to mind them. It was this great sin with which the Prophet Ezekiel charged the people of Israel: "This people have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not." And it was the same crime with which our Saviour so often charged the Jews, their posterity; and which was at last the cause of their destruction: "Hearing, ye hear, and will not understand."

And to *such as had ears to hear*, that is, the ears of the heart, He gave the charge set down in the text, *Take heed how ye hear*. For according to the measure of your attention, and your sincere desire to profit by what you hear, will be the measure of the grace and knowledge which God will give you.

Pursuant to this strict charge of our Lord and Saviour, I shall continue to shew you the true way of profiting by what you hear: of PROFITING BY SERMONS. And be assured of it, christians, that your salvation, in a great measure, depends upon your doing so. "Blessed are they," saith our Lord, "that hear the Word of God and keep it." And He assures us, in another place, that the not profiting by the Word of God will be punished more severely than the greatest crimes.

Luke 11. 28.

I shall use no more words to persuade you, *now*, and at all times, carefully to mind what you hear from *God's Word*, and from His *ministers:* but I shall proceed (as I have done before) to shew you how you may profit by some of the most important subjects which you will hear very often pressed upon you.

For instance: there are no subjects which christians are more concerned to understand, and lay to heart, than those which are called THE FOUR LAST THINGS, namely, *Death, Judgment, Heaven,* and *Hell. Death* is not to be avoided—the time uncertain: the *Judgment,* which must follow, will be without appeal; and the sentence will send us either to *Heaven* or *Hell.*

Will you, good christians, hear these subjects at any time explained, and pressed upon you, without laying them to heart? God forbid. Every man that wishes well to his own soul, will (when he hears these things) argue and resolve with himself after some such way as this:

'I have this day been put in mind of some truths, which I have not considered so well as I should have done: *that the sentence of death is already passed upon me, and that God only knows when that sentence will be put in execution.* That whenever it is put in execution, the moment I die, my fate is determined for ever. That I must not say, *when I die there will be an end of me:* so far from that, that *then* will begin my happiness or misery. And lastly, that God may be provoked to shorten my days, when He sees that I am like to make no good use of them: it was so done by the unfruitful tree: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" How very [Luke13.7.] serious should this make me, and all that hear and believe these things.

'For my own part' (will every serious christian say to himself), 'I will, by the grace of God, be no longer deaf to this call, nor flatter myself, that my *time,* my *repentance,* my *salvation,* will be always in my own power. I will consider, as I have been exhorted to do, what I was sent into the world for: that I am upon my trial; and that as I behave myself well or ill *here,* I shall be happy or miserable when I die. That if my corrupt nature be not changed for the better, before I leave this world, I must never hope to go to heaven.

SERM. IV.

I will not forget what I have been put in mind of: what a dreadful thing it will be, if I should be surprised by death, while I am leading a *careless*, a *useless*, or a *sinful* life; before I have done any good in my generation; and when I have nothing to look back on, but what must render me altogether unworthy of mercy.

'That this may not be my sad case when I come to die, I will no longer defer making my peace with God by a speedy repentance, lest my case grow every day more desperate, as [Matt.3.8.] most surely it will; and that I may have time to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*,—the only sure sign that my repentance was sincere.

'In the next place, that I may not be distracted with the cares of this world, when my thoughts should be upon another, I will settle my worldly concerns while I am in health, and after such a manner as no curse may cleave to any thing I shall leave behind me. In the mean time, I will endeavour to mortify all my evil and corrupt affections, and to wean my heart from the love of a world which I must leave so very soon. I will strive to live in peace with all the world, and every night lie down to sleep with the same charitable dispositions with which I desire and hope to die. I will endeavour to secure an interest in the mercy of God, at the hour of death, by acts of *justice*, *mercy*, and *charity*, while I live. I will, as I have been exhorted to do, endeavour always to be found in the way of my duty, that when my Lord comes, He may find me so doing, and that I may hear those [Matt. 25. 21.] comfortable words; *Well done, good and faithful servant.* I will endeavour, in the mean time, to be pleased with all God's choices, that when sickness and death approach, it may be no new thing to me to submit *my will* to the will of God. I will consider *sickness*, and all those *afflictions which lead to death*, as ordered by a gracious God and Father. And that they must be the effect of His mercy, Who cannot take delight in the miseries of His creatures; and Who could take us out of the world without the least notice, were it for His glory and for our good.

'Lastly, I will (as I have been taught) consider *death* as a righteous sentence of God passed upon all men for sin, and which He will graciously accept as a sacrifice, in union with

that of Jesus Christ, for all the sins which we have truly repented of.

'Such a preparation for death as this, I am convinced, will free me from the fear of death, and from all other fears which are worse than death.

'*The sting of death is sin;* it is this which makes death frightful. If I can have any reasonable assurance, that my sins will be forgiven, my death will then be a passage only to a much better world; and, if it has not been my own fault, I may say with St. Paul, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.' [1 Cor. 15. 56.] [Phil. 1. 21.]

These are the truths which every christian should remember; these the resolutions he should make, whenever he hears a discourse of *death,* in order to the making his peace with God; that his death may be a blessing to him, and that he may find mercy at the great DAY OF JUDGMENT.

That is another article of a christian man's faith, which you will often hear recommended to you from the pulpit, and from the Word of God, as a subject of the greatest concern to you.

For the love, therefore, that you have for your own souls, do not *read* or *hear* of THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, without resolving to profit by it. Let every man *think,* and *argue,* and *resolve* thus with himself:

'If the bitterness of death were over when our heads are laid in the grave, it would be then no great matter how we live, or how we die; but when God has expressly told us, "that He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness;" and that He has given the world notice and *assurance* of this, by His raising of His Son Jesus Christ from the dead; *this* makes it a matter of concern, indeed, how we spend our lives. "He will judge the world in righteousness;" that is, "He will render to every man according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil."

Acts 17. 31. [Rom. 2. 6.] [2 Cor. 5. 10.]

'How often' (ought every christian to say with concern), 'how often have I heard this without thinking how to prepare for that great day, and the account I am then to make! I see what great reason the Church had to put that prayer into my mouth, *In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver me.* And I see too what reason I [Litany.]

SERM. IV.

have never to repeat that prayer but with the greatest zeal and devotion, *that I may find mercy at that day.* But then (as I hope for mercy at that day), I must think of it, and prepare for it; and order my life according to that law by which I am then to be judged, acquitted, or condemned. In order to this, I see I must (as I have been exhorted to do) not suffer myself to lose the sight of that *great day,* either by business, pleasures, or diversions; but my great concern must be (will every serious christian say to himself), my care must be, to govern my life and actions with an eye to the account I must then give, and the judgment that must follow. My care must *now* be to judge myself, that I may not be condemned of the Lord. And the way I have been directed is this: never to stifle or silence my conscience, but let it pass a righteous sentence upon every thing I do, or undertake; and to ask myself, upon every occasion, some such questions as these:

'What account shall I give to my great Judge, for this *idle, useless* life I now lead? What account can I give for the estate His providence has put into my hands? What use have I made of the talents He has intrusted me with; of the *authority* He has given me, in order to promote His honour and the good of my fellow-creatures; of the *riches* He has given me, that I may be able to relieve the necessities of such as are in want; of the *knowledge* He has vouchsafed me, that I may be able to instruct the ignorant? All these I must *then* account for, as sure as I *now* live; though I am accountable to nobody *now,* and though I think not of the account I am to give. Will not this forbidden pleasure, this unrighteous gain, which I have set my heart upon, will it not one day rise up in judgment against me? How shall I be able to answer for this *trouble,* this *wrong,* this *hardship,* this unjust *vexation,* I am going to give my neighbour? I have it in the power of my hand to do what I please. Be it so. But what advantage will *that* be to me, when I shall have to do with an Almighty God, Who has declared, "that [Wisd. 6. 6.] mighty men shall be mightily tormented?" I have now *no fear* upon my spirits. *Well;* but remember, that a day is coming, when the stoutest, the stubbornest heart upon earth will tremble.

'What folly, what madness, must it be to provoke Him, by my ungodly deeds, Who is to be my Judge, to acquit or condemn me!'

Let that man, who does *now* blaspheme the name of the Great God, but think with himself, How shall I stand before Him in judgment? I will bring you off; I will gain your cause; saith a skilful lawyer: but can you bring me off, if my cause is unjust, when I shall stand before the Great Judge of the world?

A man may say to himself, this is a *poor, ignorant, friendless* person, I have to deal with; I can deal with him as I please. But hold a little, and consider; can you deal as you please with Him Who has declared Himself to be "the helper of the friendless; the avenger of the fatherless and the widow." [Deut. 10. 18.]

Well, says another thoughtless man to himself, nobody knows, nor *shall* know, this that I am going about. Alas! you conclude too hastily: does not *He* know it, "to Whose eyes all things are naked and open," and Who has declared, that "He will bring every the most secret thing into judgment?" [Heb.4.13.] [Eccles. 12. 14.]

Why (will every thoughtful christian argue with himself), why should I spend my whole life in that which will not profit me in the day of judgment? It will not then be asked, whether I was rich, or poor; but how I bore my poor condition, or what use I made of my riches? We are told, by our Judge Himself, what questions will be asked at that day. And will it not be the highest wisdom for every man to ask himself those questions *now*, that he may know what answers to make?

For instance: let me ask myself, Have I been merciful to poor and needy people, and to such as were destitute of help and comfort? If you have not, it concerns you, above all things, to consider how you will be able to bear that doom which will then be passed by your Judge: "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; naked, and ye clothed me not." Matt. 25.

And if this is to be the sad sentence which shall be passed upon the hard-hearted and uncharitable at the great day, what must the *oppressor* expect? What have *they* to fear,

SERM. IV.

who waste their estates in riotous living, in pride and vanity, while so many are in want even of the necessaries of life? What will they have to say for themselves, who have done nothing towards their salvation? Why; they will be in the sad condition of that man, "who had not on him a wedding garment:" they will stand speechless: their sin and their conscience will stop their mouth.

[Matt. 22. 11, 12.]

Such as these *will* be, or *ought* to be, the meditations of every serious christian, when he hears a discourse concerning *a future judgment*, or when he hears that great day mentioned in Scripture.

The consequence of *that judgment* is another of those subjects which christians should never forget. It is not *I*, but your Lord and Judge, Who tells you what will follow the judgment of the great day:—"The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

John 5. 28, 29.

You hear, good christians, how nearly we are all concerned *in this revelation of the different portions of good and bad men in the next world.* My purpose is, to shew you the true way of *profiting* by what you shall at any time hear upon these subjects.

For example: when you hear the description of HELL, and the fearful punishment of impenitent sinners, that they "will be sent to a place of torment; that they must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire; that their worm never dieth; that they are to be tormented for ever and ever; and that they shall seek death, but shall not find it;" when you hear these amazing truths, do not strive to forget them; do not go about to question them, for they are the declarations of God Himself; and they are revealed to us as the strongest motives to repentance and an holy life, *and that we may never come into that place of torment.* They are designed to restrain sinners from ruining themselves, and will be found *true*, whether they *believe*, whether they *think* of them, whether they *fear* them, or not. "Woe unto you that laugh now," says our Lord (that is, that strive to divert the thoughts of the wrath to come), "for ye shall mourn and weep."

Luke 16.28. Jude 7. Mark 9. 44. Rev. 20. 10. [9. 6.] [Luke 6. 25.]

'I will therefore' (will every christian of sense and sobriety say), 'I will abhor and avoid, as I would do the devil himself, the company and conversation of those reprobate men, who make a jest of *sin*, of *hell*, and of *eternal torments*. If it is uneasy to me, and I tremble, when I but think of these things, let me consider the most deplorable condition of those lost souls, who now feel those torments, and who would not be persuaded to think of, and to fear them, when it was in their power, through the grace of God, to escape them.'

But then, you will remember, that it is not enough to fear, unless your fears have this good effect, to make you fear to offend Him, *Who can destroy both body and soul in that hell* which you tremble to think of. And remember, likewise, that we need not take pains to *go to that place of torment*; our corrupt nature will lead us thither of course, if we do not *strive*, if we do not *take pains*, to avoid it. [Matt. 10. 28.]

It is for this reason, and not to fright us without cause, that the Spirit of God has represented the portion of the damned as the greatest of all evils; that men may be prevailed on *to work out their salvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern answerable to the punishment they will escape by so doing. [Phil. 2. 12.]

No christian, who hears and lays this to heart, will flatter himself, that God will not be so severe as He has threatened. "The very angels that sinned," we are assured, "are reserved in everlasting chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And so *sure*, as well as *severe*, will the punishment of sinners be, that no less a sacrifice than the life of His own Son could prevail with God to accept of their repentance. So that such as do not repent have nothing to look for but judgment without mercy, as sure as *this Word*, and *that God*, Whose word it is, *is true*. [Jude ver. 6.] The Bible.

These truths, good christians, you will often hear pressed upon you, by God in His Word, and by His ministers in their sermons. Will you not give yourselves leave to think of them after you leave the church? God forbid. I will tell you what you should do, that you may profit by them. We should, every soul of us, reason and resolve thus with himself.

'I will endeavour to keep in my mind a dread of those

SERM. IV.

fearful punishments, which (I am assured) are to be the portion of those who live without fear of what must come hereafter. I will consider what my religion requires of me, in order to be secure from these threatened evils. And I will also remember who those are, who (as God Himself hath declared) shall be condemned to hell, if they do not repent in time.'

[2 Thess. 1. 8, 9.] They are such *as know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.* "These," saith the Apostle, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction." So that all UNBELIEVERS, and all christians that live like unbelievers,

1 Cor. 6. [9, 10.] *fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind; all thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners;* all these, without a timely and sincere repentance, are to have their portion with devils.

A man must be wretchedly careless indeed, who can hear this declaration of God Himself, and not think of getting out of the way of perdition. And even the best of men will fear for themselves, when they hear our Saviour declare,

[Matt. 7. 13.] "that broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many, many there are that are in it." And all christians, who give themselves liberty to think of these things, will, when they are tempted to sin, ask themselves some such questions as these:

'What is it I hazard my soul for? For pleasures that I shall soon be sick of; for riches that I shall leave in a very short time; and for a world that will forget me as soon as I am gone. What will it profit me, when this pleasure I am so fond of will certainly be bitterness in the end? When this unjust gain will be followed with the loss of my soul? When this tenderness of myself, which will *now* not suffer me to mortify my corruptions, will be punished with everlasting burnings?'

These thoughts, good christians, if kept in your memory, and pondered in your hearts, will help to preserve you from ruin, in the midst of a most profligate age:—an age in which there are people who neither fear God nor what He can do to them; who can laugh at damnation; who can wish it to themselves and others without trembling; and who are in the certain way to the lake which burneth with fire and brim-

stone, without caring what will become of them. These, christians should have no fellowship with, as they value their own souls; as ever they expect the favour of God; as ever they hope for the happiness of heaven.

THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN is another of those motives which our gracious God would not let us want, that we may have all the encouragement imaginable to fit ourselves for that happy state and place. A *place,* as the Spirit of God represents it, where there is neither *want,* nor *sorrow,* nor *sickness,* nor *pain,* nor *oppression,* nor *afflictions,* nor *troubles,* of any kind. But the happiness of that state no mortal can comprehend: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," [saith St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 9.] "neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

You will not, sure, hear these things with indifference; or return home without considering, over and over again, the happiness of heaven, and the way to be secure of it when you die.

I will endeavour to help your meditations upon this subject, and shew you how you *may* and *ought* to profit by such sermons. Every christian should reason thus with himself: 'I have the sure word of God for it, that my condition when I die will be infinitely happy, even beyond what I *can* imagine, if it is not my own fault. At the same time, God has given me to understand, that before I can be fit for heaven, my nature must be changed; that *I must love Him with all my heart and soul,* and that, for His sake, *I must love all mankind,* otherwise *I cannot* be admitted into that blessed society. He has also shewed me the way how I may attain *these holy dispositions,* which are so absolutely necessary to fit me for heaven. That, in order to love Him with all my heart, I must believe in Him, and give entire credit to every thing which He has made known to us. That I must fear Him: fear to do any thing that I believe will displease Him. That I must obey Him: do what He has commanded, and avoid what He has forbidden. That I must submit to all His choices for me, and endeavour that my heart may always go along with my lips in this petition—THY WILL BE DONE. That I must give Him the honour due unto His name; *speak*

SERM. IV.

of Him with reverence; *worship* Him with great devotion; *pray* to Him for what I want; and give Him *praise* and *thanks* for all His mercies. And lastly, that I must close with the means of grace which He has ordained for my edification, and by which He will give me the earnest of His Holy Spirit. By observing these rules, I shall come to love God with all my heart, and be qualified for that happiness for which He created me.

'In order TO LOVE MY NEIGHBOUR, which is another qualification for heaven and happiness, I must neither *do* nor *wish* any ill to him. I must remember, "that whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer; and that no murderer has any inheritance in the kingdom of heaven." All *bitterness*, and *wrath*, and *anger*, and *clamour*, and *strife*, and *evil speaking*, and *malice*, must, as the Apostle exhorts, "be put away from such as hope for the happiness of heaven." We must be both just and charitable, "ready to give, and glad to distribute." We must *forgive*, and *give*, as becomes brethren and the disciples of Jesus Christ. These are the ways by which we are to *express*, and *gain*, and *increase*, that love for our neighbour which must qualify us for heaven.

1 John 3. 15. [Gal. 5. 21.] Ephes. 4. 31 [1 Tim. 6. 18.]

'And, in the last place, *with regard to my own self*, God has made known to me, what qualifications are necessary *to make me worthy to be partaker of the inheritance with the Saints in heaven*. That I must be *humble*, for God hateth and resisteth the proud. I must be *chaste*, for no unclean person can enter into heaven. I must be *temperate* and *sober*, lest that day overtake me unawares. That as I hope to follow my Saviour to heaven, I must deny myself, and take up the cross; I must mortify my affections and lusts; keep under my body and bring it into subjection; part with any thing, as dear as a *right hand* or a *right eye*, rather than do what will offend God, and shut me out of heaven. Lastly, He has commanded me to *watch*, to *walk* circumspectly; to keep my heart with all diligence; because I have an adversary, which, like a roaring lion, is continually seeking to ruin me.

[Col. 1. 12.]

'These things I must endeavour to remember, as I love my soul, and as I hope for heaven; and I must order my life accordingly: for so has Christ expressly told us, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into

[Matt. 7. 21.]

the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."'

This, my christian brethren, is the way we must take *to profit by sermons* upon these important subjects. It is thus we must endeavour to affect our minds, that we may *remember*, that we may *never forget, these truths*, which concern us as much as our souls are worth. This being the only way to be secure of a blessed eternity, to be ever and anon asking ourselves some such short questions as these:

'Why am I afraid of death? Why do I put the thoughts of it far from me? Is it not because I know that I am not prepared to die? Have I considered how miserable I shall be, if death should surprise me either doing evil, or doing nothing, or doing that which was not my duty to do? Is it because I fancy that I have time sufficient before me to prepare for death? But then I forget, *that a christian life is the only sure preparation for death;* and I forget also what Jesus Christ hath declared, "Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." [Rev. 3. 3.] Is not this the time in which I am to choose whether I am to be miserable or happy for ever? And shall I let this time slip out of my hands? Do not I know, that I shall come out of the grave just as I go into it, either fit for heaven, or fit for no place but hell? Have not I myself seen many surprised by death when they least thought of it; and were amazed when they saw that it was too late to bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life? What, if this uncomfortable case should be my own!'

One would ask further: 'What will this life I lead end in? Will my great Judge approve of this way of spending my time, my estate, and the other talents He has intrusted me with? Can I hope to hear Him say, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* [Matt. 25. 21.] Or will not the manner of my life oblige Him to say, *Thou wicked servant, thou hast done nothing that I commanded thee?* [Matt. 25. 26, &c.] What is it I am losing my inheritance in heaven for? For some poor pleasure; for some pitiful gain; or to gratify some filthy lust? Can I imagine that the glorious inheritance of the children of God must cost me no pains, no trouble, to attain it, when it cost my Saviour His life to purchase it for me? Lastly; let me ask myself that question, which my Saviour

SERM. IV. [Matt. 16. 26.]

has put into my mouth, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* What pains ought I not to take, rather than run the hazard of suffering the bitter pains of eternal death?

Let these things, christians, enter deep into your hearts; do not forget them as soon as you leave the church; beg of God to give you grace to profit by them. And be assured of this, that there is no greater happiness in this life, than to have reasonable hopes of a blessed eternity: which God grant we may all have, and that we may meet in peace in the paradise of God, for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To Whom, &c.

SERMON V.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE xi. 28.

Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.

See Levit. 25. 14; Prov. 3. 9; 14. 33; 18. 3; 19. 17; Ps. 17. 14; 37. 2; Isa. 3. 15; Matt. 6. 19, 25; Luke 3. 14; 16. 9; 1 Cor. 6.10; Eph. 4. 28; 1 Tim. 6. 9, 10, 17; Heb. 13. 5.

You have here the Word of Christ for this important truth, that the preaching of the Gospel, the hearing it with attention and zeal, and leading a life answerable thereunto, is a sure way to blessedness or happiness.

You know the doom of those who heard the sermons of Christ, and would not mind them: "It shall" (saith our Saviour and Judge), "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that people." By which you see, christians, the great hazard you will run, if you live under the light and ordinances of the Gospel, and are not bettered by them.

Our Saviour Himself tells you, who it is that tempts you to hear the Word with indifference, and to forget what you hear; to despise the preacher, and the ordinance of God. He tells you, that it is the devil, that taketh the word out of the hearts of those that are not careful to keep it, lest they should believe and be saved.

Lastly; you may be assured of it, that the Word preached will become the word of salvation to every one that believeth; to every one who comes to hear with a teachable temper of mind, with a serious purpose and desire to learn his duty, and with a resolution to practise what he hears.

My design in this discourse (as it has been in several others) is, to shew you *how you may best profit by the sermons you hear;* that you may return from the house of God with benefit, and with a blessing.

SERM. V.

In order to this, I will propose to you several subjects of importance, and shew you how every christian should apply what he hears to himself.

But in the first place, as ever you hope to profit by what you read or hear, endeavour to discharge your heart of a too great fondness for the world and its idols.

It is not *I*, but our Lord Himself assures you, that let the seed be never so good, yet if it be sown among thorns, they
Matt.13.22. will choke it at last; that is, as He Himself explains it, "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, will choke the word, and it will become unfruitful."

I. *A too great fondness*, therefore, *for the things of this world*, or what we call COVETOUSNESS, *being the greatest hindrance to piety and christian knowledge*, we will first consider this evil, and the great mischiefs that attend it.

Luke 12.15. "Take heed," saith our Saviour, "and beware of covetousness." Can we imagine that He would have given christians this *double*, this *earnest* caution, but that He knew that there is something in this sin very destructive. And you will be convinced there is, if you will attend to what follows.

First; That no man can possibly love God, whose heart is
1 John 2.15. set upon the world, let him pretend what he will. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So saith the Spirit of God.

Secondly; It leads men insensibly into atheism; that is, to depend more upon themselves and upon their own industry and wealth, than upon *God*, His *providence*, and *blessing*.

Thirdly; It strangely tempts men to believe, that any thing almost is lawful, which will but increase their substance.

Fourthly; It most surprisingly changeth the heart, and dispositions of men. A compassionate man, once possessed with a spirit of covetousness, becomes hard-hearted; a liberal temper becomes stingy; and he that was charitable before now grudges every penny he parts with.

It is branded in Scripture with the name of *idolatry*, because it tempts men to have such an esteem for wealth, as if their life and *happiness* depended upon having a great deal. And that which still makes this sin more hateful to God is this, that it is (what the Spirit of God calls it) THE ROOT OF

ALL EVIL;—the root of *every evil*, of *injustice*, of *oppression*, 1 Tim. 6. 10.
of *extortion*, of *cheating* one another, of *thieving*, of *contention*,
of *law-suits*, of wishing for the death of parents, &c.

In short, it is a damnable sin; and whoever lives in it is in a state of perdition: and it has this sad circumstance attending it, that few can be persuaded that they are guilty of it, and therefore cannot be persuaded to repent of it. And yet, no doubt of it, a sin branded in Scripture with being *the root of all evil* must of necessity be known by such as are guilty of it, if it is not their own fault, that they may be left without excuse.

Any man, for instance, may conclude for certain that he is under the power of this evil spirit, when he is more intent upon the world than in taking care of his soul; when his love of gain puts him upon suspicious ways and means of increasing his substance, or denying his neighbour his rights. Suspicious, I mean, to himself; for even *that* ought to hinder a good man from doing any thing which he *does but fear* may displease God, or injure another.

To proceed: that person is possessed with a *spirit of covetousness*, who has such an opinion and esteem for wealth as if it could make him happy. Such a man, saith the prophet, "coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set Hab. 2. 9.
his nest on high, and be delivered from the power of evil;" that is, that he may depend upon himself, be out of the reach of misfortunes, and be independent upon God's providence.

Thirdly: a man may know whether his care and concern for the world does not often make him omit the duties he owes to God and to himself, or perform them with indifference and distraction; when the time is often grudged in which they are performed; when the Lord's day is profaned by unnecessary worldly business, and such business made use of as a pretence for neglecting family duties. When a man shews no gratitude to God for the favours He has bestowed upon him, by doing a proportionable good with them; and when his concern for himself makes him unconcerned for those that want his help. When a man's mind is distracted with imaginary fears of wanting; or who makes his necessities greater than indeed they are, and therefore can never be

SERM. V.

satisfied with his present condition. Lastly; when every disappointment, every loss or misfortune, casts him into trouble, grief, or despair, not being permitted to consider, that it is from God, Who orders all things for the best. These are all instances of *that covetousness* which the Scripture condemns as leading to perdition. And whoever *is*, or is in danger of being, possessed with this spirit (for that such are possessed with an evil spirit, one need no more question, than that Judas was possessed with such a spirit when Satan entered into him); whoever is in this sad circumstance had need to get out of the snare of the devil as soon as possible.

We should now proceed to consider how this is to be done; but it will be necessary to take notice, first, of what is but too often made use of as a cloak for this sin.

1 Tim. 5. 8. The Apostle saith, "He that provideth not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, or kindred, hath forfeited the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

People are apt to think that this will justify them, let them be never so worldly-minded. When in truth (and they will find it is so, if they will but look into their Bibles), the Apostle is not directing christians to provide estates for their children, but to take care of their poor relations, and not let others be burdened with them.

We come now to consider, what use a serious christian should make upon hearing the *nature*, the *deceitfulness*, the *danger*, and the *end*, of this sin. Now, a christian who desires to profit by what he hears will think thus with himself:

Eph. 5. 5. 'I have heard what the Spirit of God saith; that "every covetous man, who is an idolater, hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God." And shall not so terrible a truth put a stop to an over-greedy desire of getting more than I really want? I see what my duty is. It is to labour in my proper business; depending upon God's blessing; without disquieting myself with unreasonable fears of wanting. And this I am to do; first, in order to supply my own and the necessities of those that belong to me; and then, to supply the necessities of those that are in want. I will not let the hurry of business, therefore (will every serious christian say), I will not let worldly business hinder me from serving God, because

I serve myself most when I serve Him. I will endeavour always to remember, that I am in the hands of God, Who has commanded us "to cast all our care upon Him, for He careth for us;" and Who, having given us life even before we could ask it, will never let us want the necessary means of preserving it. I will beg of God, that He will grant me grace to make a good use of what He shall give me, which will be a sure way of obtaining more favours from Him. 1 Pet. 5. 7.

'And since the Spirit of God assures me, that when I do good to others I do most good to myself, I will therefore endeavour to make myself friends against the great day, *by giving alms of such things as I have,* as our Lord commands us. And because I cannot have a better rule than that which the Apostle has given us (will every serious christian say who lives by GAIN), *I will constantly lay by me in store as God hath prospered me,* that I may have to give to him that needeth. And that I may do this more cheerfully, I will beg of God to preserve me from an evil spirit of covetousness; and *that I may lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come.* Luke 11.41. 1 Cor. 16. 2. [1 Tim. 6. 19.]

'In order to this, I will often call to mind such scriptures as these: "that wealth profiteth not in the day of wrath;" either when we fall into affliction, or when we come to die. "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" "So (saith our Lord) is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;" that is, employing his riches to God's glory, or transmitting them to heaven by the hands of the poor. "Remember," saith Abraham to the rich man, "that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things;" the things in which thou didst place thy very soul and happiness; "and likewise Lazarus, evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." [Prov. 11. 4.] Luke 12. 20, 21. Luke 16. 25.

Will any christian, after this, call those his *good things,* which may be lost when he least thinks of it; that he cannot keep without fear, nor part with without vexation; which tempt us to forget God; are a snare to us while we live; and may, without a mighty grace, be a curse to us when we are dead? Rather let us all beg of God to convince us most effectually of the vanity of all the idols of this world, which we are but

SERM. V.

too apt to doat on, that we may not, like unbelievers, look for happiness here; and especially, that God would keep us from every degree of a sin, which is the mother of so many evils.

What those evils are, we now come to take a short view of; that as we value our souls, we may abhor and avoid them.

II. The first we shall consider, is that of *Oppression;* when a man bears hard upon his neighbour, because it is in the power of his hand to do it; or when it is not in the power of his neighbour to contend with him. Or, secondly, when a man's necessities force him to submit to the very hardest terms his neighbour thinks fit to impose upon him. Or, thirdly, when a man will take all the advantage of a hard bargain which the law will give him, though it be to the great loss of his neighbour.

These, and such as these, are very great crimes, and will shut men out of heaven, though no law on earth can take hold of those that are guilty of them. And indeed nobody thinks them small crimes, when they themselves come to be the sufferers.

Prov. 22. 16, 23. Hear what the Spirit saith of these sins: "He that oppresseth the poor, to increase his riches, shall surely come to Zech. 7. 10. want." "Oppress not the poor;" that is, those that are not able to contend with you; "the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them." But, above [1 Cor. 6. 10.] all, hear these terrible words of God: "Oppressors, extortioners, shall not inherit the kingdom of God;" and then you know what they must inherit.

III. Injustice is another sin to which a spirit of covetousness leads men. I shall not take notice of those instances of injustice which the laws of men *may* and *ought* to punish, and do the sufferers right, without making it cost them more than it is worth.

There are other instances of injustice, as evil in the sight of God, and as damnable in the end, though people make a shift to live in them, without public reproach, or check of conscience: such are, *taking advantage* of men's mistakes, ignorance, simplicity, and the like.

I will put you in mind of instances of this kind, that you may avoid the sin and the punishment.

If a man is in drink, he is, in the very language of the world, *over-seen.* Now, if in such a condition he happens to fall into bad hands, and makes a bargain, it is ten to one but he repents when he is sober, and too often his family smart for it. Shall I go about to prove, that it is a sin to insist upon such a bargain? Every man who has a conscience knows it to be so; but perhaps every body does not remember what God has expressly declared, "that He will be the avenger of all such as go beyond or defraud another in any matter." 1Thess. 4. 6.

How easily may a poor man, who has a righteous cause, mistake, or be unable to defend it: but will his oversight or inability give me or you a right to that, to which in truth we had no just title; or will the judgment of a court lessen the injustice, when it comes to be tried at the great day?

To feed a man with money when I know he has no real occasion, only that I may get a bargain of his estate when he shall be forced to sell it; this is thought to be no great crime; and yet it is plain I help to ruin him, and perhaps his family; and if he sins in squandering the inheritance of his forefathers, is it possible for me to be without guilt?

Because, in wronging *orphans* and *widows*, and *poor people*, a man has less powerful people to deal with, is he therefore less wicked? No, sure; so far from it, that God has declared Himself concerned in such causes: "Their Redeemer (saith Solomon) is mighty; He shall plead their cause with thee." Prov. 23. 11

How often do wills and writings of moment, and even other things of value, fall into the hands of persons to whom they do not belong. The sin of concealing such things is looked upon as a less sin than stealing: but for no reason, I am sure, but because in one case he may be in danger of being hanged, if he is caught; and in the other, he will only be called a dishonest man, which such a man will not lay much to heart. But christians should consider, that the judgment of a righteous God will not be according to the foolish opinion of men.

It is too common for people to conceal and keep what they have found. Such people do not, sure, know, that there is

SERM. V. Levit. 6.

an express law of God against such practices; nor do they ever think how they shall answer it at the great day of accounts.

If a man will take all advantages which the law will give him, he will very often do great injustice in the sight of God, and make himself liable to *restitution*, without which his repentance and salvation will be very hazardous. And indeed a man must love the world exceeding well, even better than his own soul, who will put his neighbour to *trouble, grief*, and *expense*, to seek for his rights in equity, when he knows beforehand that in equity he will or ought to be relieved.

But the sins of fraud and injustice, which are most common and least taken notice of, are such as are committed in the way of trade and bargains. The Wise Man has given all
Ecclus.27.2. people fair warning of this: "As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling." Every christian therefore, who desires to keep a good conscience, will be glad to have such rules to walk by, as he needs not be deceived, unless he be willing to
Matt. 7. 12. be deceived. Such is that of our Saviour's: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Which, though a general rule, may by a well-meaning christian be applied to all our dealings one with another; while those that are resolved to be rich, whatever shall be the consequence, all the rules of the Gospel, though never so well explained, will be of little use to them. But for such as do really make a conscience of their ways, one would endeavour to make their way plain and safe.

Now, gain being the great and just end of trade, of which every man for himself must be judge, and consequently too apt to be favourable to his own interest, I shall therefore recommend one very plain rule, which will go a great way towards directing every conscientious man of business, how to act safely with regard to gain. And this is, *to take such a gain, advantage, or consideration, as the person with whom I deal would be satisfied with, if he knew my business as well as I do myself, and the reasons which oblige me to take such a profit.* Whoever makes this his rule, his conscience will never reproach him of injustice. But if, instead of doing so,

men will take all that they can get; make an hand of the *ignorance, necessities,* or *simplicity,* of those with whom they deal; they do what they *must* know to be unjust, and make themselves liable to one of the most difficult duties of Christianity, and that is, RESTITUTION, without which their repentance will *not* be accepted of God.

But before we come to consider this duty of restitution, I would add a few words concerning the *now* common, but scandalous, crimes of *pilfering* and *stealing.*

I am very sensible, that few of those who have fallen into these base, bewitching sins, will mind what can be said from the pulpit or from the Word of God. The Spirit of God saith indeed, that "a curse or evil spirit entereth into the house of the thief, to consume it with the timber and stones." Zech. 5. 4. But what will this signify to those that have neither *faith,* nor *religion,* nor *shame,* nor *fear?*

But it will not, one would hope, be in vain to advise those who are not yet arrived to this height of sinning, to repent and leave it in time; for, be assured of it, that when a spirit of pilfering has once taken possession of a man, it will, if not resisted, lead him to every degree of that sin, till it brings him to ruin both of soul and body; and that it will be as difficult for him, whatever his condition in the world afterwards may be, to break off an habit of stealing, as it is for a drunkard, or a whoremaster, or a common swearer, to leave off those vices that are become a second nature to them.

How exceeding careful, therefore, should parents be to discourage every the least degree of this sin, every shadow of it; to warn their children, over and over again, against so base, so scandalous a vice, which is so hard to be forsaken, so hard to be repented of. For *restitution* must be made, for all the sins we have been speaking of, as ever men hope for salvation, at least in the sincere endeavour.

I will no more go about to prove that RESTITUTION *is a necessary duty,* than I would take pains to persuade you that ROBBING *is a sin.* Every man's conscience, every man who dare ask his conscience, must tell him so. And if any man is easy under the guilt of this sin, he will be easy under the guilt of any other sin. For, sure, the same reason and justice, which oblige me to restore what I have borrowed, will

SERM. V.

oblige me to make restitution for what I have wronged a man of. This being a certain truth, that all a man gets wrongfully is theft and robbery, and no better. Therefore, delay not, christians, at the peril of your souls, to make satisfaction for any injustice or wrong you have done, while it is in your power. And if any scruple arises in your breast concerning the way of doing it, go to your pastor, or to some person of judgment and discretion, who may be able to silence your doubts, and quiet your conscience. Without doing this, a man of any thought can have no comfort either living or dying. This day, saith our Saviour to Zaccheus,

Luke 19. 9. "This day is salvation come to thy house." So that until he had sincerely resolved to make restitution, he was not in a state of salvation: he was in a state of perdition.

The law of God to the Israelites is so particular upon this

Levit. 6. 2, &c. head, that I must repeat it to you. "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour, or hath found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it; he shall restore it in the principal, and add a fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth. And then the priest shall receive his trespass-offering, and make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him." And pray take notice, that this command did not concern such as were convicted of these crimes of injustice before a magistrate; but such whose own conscience accused them, and who desired peace and pardon from God.

This was the way prescribed by God Himself. This is the voice of the Law and the Gospel; and, let me add, of natural reason: for every body who has been wronged expects satisfaction; and, if it is denied by men, is apt to appeal to God for justice and vengeance. So that the most ignorant know their duty in this case; and if they are loath to make restitution, it is because the fear of God is not in their hearts. They will venture their souls rather than part with what they have got.

Christians therefore, who wish well to themselves, and are convinced of the absolute necessity of this duty, will think

beforehand, when they are tempted to any of the sins we have been speaking of: they will think what a bitter cup they are preparing for themselves, if they give way to such temptations.

Christians would do well to consider, how it was with Judas when his conscience was awake. He valued the thirty pieces of silver no more than the very earth he trod upon; he flung them away; he confessed his injustice before the world; and would have given the world, if he had had it, to have had it in his power to have undone what he had been guilty of. And, surely, this will be the case of every one, either now or hereafter, who knows he has done wrong, and will not be persuaded to make timely satisfaction.

On the other hand, a christian who resolves to do his duty in this instance to the best of his power (for God expects no more), by doing so, he gives glory to God; he acknowledges the justice of His laws, the power He has to punish offenders, His mercy in accepting the repentance of sinners upon the most equitable conditions; he shews, that he fears God, and that he values the favour of God more than his own profit or his own reputation; and has the surest proof and comfort, that his repentance is sincere, and his sin forgiven.

I shall conclude this article of restitution with the words of that excellent godly divine, Bishop BEVERIDGE[a]: "All persons that ever wronged any man of any thing, are bound to make restitution; all that by forging, or concealing of deeds, or tampering with witnesses, have got possession of other men's estates; all that by robbing, or any kind of theft, have stolen what was their neighbour's; all servants and apprentices, who neglect their master's business, embezzle or purloin his goods; all that by false measures or weights impose upon their customers; all that conceal the faults of the goods they sell; all that cheat or over-reach those they deal with; all that by any wicked artifice defraud their creditors of what is their due; all that by smuggling of goods, forswearing themselves, or bribing of others, withhold from the king any part of his customs, or other revenues, which the laws of God and of the land have given him a just right to;—in short, all that have been either princi-

[a] [Works, vol. iii. p. 221. Oxf. ed. 1844.]

SERM. V.

pals or accessories in wronging any man of any thing, they are bound to make full restitution." Thus far that good man.

Now every serious christian, who hears these things and lays them to heart, will reason and resolve with himself after some such way as this:

'I see plainly that I must not judge of the greatness of the sins of injustice and fraud, by the opinion and way of the world, but by the authority of God who has forbidden them, by the punishments He has threatened, and by the mischiefs that attend them. Such sins, being committed without remorse, are too often forgotten; and, it is to be feared, are too seldom repented of. I will not therefore let the love of the world possess my soul, lest it choke the seed of God's Word sown in my heart, and those truths which should keep me from ruin. Such as these: *He that hasteth to be rich, can hardly be innocent.* That all depends upon the blessing of God, which cannot be hoped for in unrighteous ways. That every man living has a right to be dealt with fairly and with justice. That neither life nor happiness consisteth in the abundance any man possesseth. That it will be no advantage to a man to have doubled his talents, if at the same time he has doubled his guilt. That posterity will feel the effects of my injustice; God having declared, *that He will lay up the iniquities of sinners for their children.* And lastly, *that there is nothing that a man can get in exchange for his soul.*'

Prov. 28. 20.

Job 22. 28; [27. 13, &c.]

[Matt. 16. 26.]

These considerations I will dwell upon, will every serious christian say, when he has heard them from the pulpit, or from God's Word. And may this be the resolution of every soul who has now heard these things, and attended to them. In order to this, I will leave a few things with you to be remembered.

Suppose, for example, you should see one of your poor neighbours *wronged,* or deprived of his just rights or goods, by *robbery,* by *oppression,* or by *fraud.* To see a whole family in trouble; their minds uneasy; their health and rest broken; their necessary business neglected; tempted to murmur against God; and to curse such as have been the occasion of their trouble. Let, I say, any body who has the least spark

of *humanity, grace,* or *goodness,* see this; and say, whether this will not make him abhor, and resolve against, every instance of *injustice, violence,* and *fraud,* which must, of necessity, give his neighbour so much sorrow and grief of heart.

If this does not affect every one that sees or hears of it (for there may be some people so destitute of humanity and grace, that provided they be easy, and can get or keep what they have gotten, are not much concerned for the sufferings of others);—let us suppose we saw such a man upon his death-bed; his eyes open, his conscience awake, and calling to mind the evil he has done his neighbour, whether by *cunning, power, violence,* or *fraud;* dreading the consequence; not knowing how to make satisfaction for the injuries he has done; ashamed to own his crimes, and yet not able to bear the thoughts of them; just going to leave the world under the greatest uncertainties of what is like to be his portion, in a very few hours, perhaps. Can there be a case, a condition, more terrible, more miserable, than this? And yet, how many are there, who, in all human appearances leave the world under these most astonishing circumstances.

Lastly; suppose people should be so *thoughtless,* so *stupid,* so *ignorant,* as to die without remorse, or fear; is their case any better than that of those who die under the fear of God's displeasure? Can it be imagined, that their ignorance or unconcernedness will alter the decrees of God, Who has expressly declared, that they that have done evil, and have not repented, shall go into everlasting fire? This should hinder christians from doing to others what they would not have done to themselves.

THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF—with such a love as worketh no ill to his neighbour. Believe it, christians, *mine* and *your* salvation depends upon the observation of this command of God.

I pray God we may remember it; and pardon us whenever through frailty we are wanting to our duty, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.

SERMON VI.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY THE PUBLIC WORSHIP.

VOUCHSAFE, O God, to direct me; and to bless this discourse to the benefit of my flock, and to all such as shall hear it; that they may glorify Thee for the truths they shall learn, and for the blessings they shall receive by my ministry; through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

1 COR. xiv. 15.

I will pray with the understanding.

See Isa. 1. 15; 29. 13; Ezek. 33. 31.

WHEN one sees christians coming constantly to church, without any visible benefit; without becoming more serious and devout at their prayers, or more regular in their lives; one cannot but conclude, either that they never ask those [James 4.3.] graces which they want, or that *they ask and have not, because they ask amiss.*

This is certain, that there is not any one grace, not one good thing, which either in *duty, interest,* or *charity,* we are bound to pray for, but what our Church has provided us proper prayers by which to ask them: and it is as certain, 1 John 5.14. that God will HEAR us, and grant our petitions, "whenever we ask any thing according to His will."

There must, therefore, be some *very great fault,* when the generality of christians (to the great scandal of the religion they profess) do, all their life long, pray for graces and blessings which they never obtain. They must have been either *ignorantly,* or *carelessly,* or *wilfully,* wanting to themselves, when they return so often from the house of God without benefit, and without a blessing; when it is most certain, that God designed these solemn meetings as the greatest of blessings;—as the best opportunity of fitting ourselves for heaven and happiness.

We will therefore consider, what may be the real cause of so *great unfruitfulness* under such powerful ordinances, and means of grace and salvation.

In the first place, then, it is but too plain that very many come to church merely out of custom; many only to avoid the reproach of having no religion; and most of all do not consider what they come to church for, what they want, what they pray for. And so it comes to pass, that christians confess their sins without being sensible of the danger of being sinners. They hear the most gracious terms of pardon declared, and the absolution pronounced, without receiving the comfort and benefit thereof. They repeat the most divine and powerful prayer of our Lord, without considering the Majesty of Him to Whom they speak, or His wonderful goodness in permitting them to come to Him as to a father.

They repeat His praises in the psalms and hymns without any true devotion; and they hear His *word*, His *commands*, His *promises*, and His *judgments*, without being moved by them to mend their lives.

In short, they solemnly profess their faith in God; they ask of Him all necessary graces and blessings; they say *Amen* to prayers which they have never attended to; and hear a blessing pronounced by the minister of God, to which God has annexed an especial grace and blessing: and, after all this, too often return home—without any benefit, without a *blessing*.

Our Saviour Christ will give you the true reason of this: "this people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." Matt. 15. 8. This was the case of the Jews before their final destruction. Let us take care that this be not our case and our fate.

To prevent this, I will set before you *the true way of profiting by the public worship of God;* and what every devout christian, who hopes for God's blessing, *should* endeavour to do, in order to obtain it.

He should, in the first place, endeavour (when he is about to go to worship God),—he should endeavour to possess his heart with a true sense of his sad condition without the grace of God. This is, by the Spirit of God, most lively represented in these words, "Thou sayest, I have need of nothing;

SERM. VI. Rev. 3. 17.

and knowest not, that thou art *wretched*, and *miserable*, and *poor*, and *blind*, and *naked*." This is *yours*, and *mine*, and *every man's* sad condition by nature, and destitute of the grace of God. We are *wretched* and *miserable* sinners; and, unless God pardon us, we are for ever undone. We are *poor* and *weak* creatures, in danger (as Job was) of being ruined by our adversary the devil. We are *blind*, and in the dark, as to every thing relating to our happiness or misery. And we are *naked*, and destitute of every virtue that might recommend us to the favour of God.

These are the thoughts which we should take along with us to the house of God; and we should consider what we are going thither for; namely, to beg of God to pardon and forgive us our sins; to give God thanks for the mercies and favours which He has vouchsafed us; to learn how we may live so as to please God; to make a public and open profession of our faith; and to ask such things as are needful both for our souls and bodies. This is truly to pray with the understanding.

Now, every christian, who has these things in his mind and at heart, will, when he goes to church, be very serious; endeavour to lay aside all worldly thoughts; and will beg of God to dispose and assist him in the work he is going about. And it is for this reason, that all well-taught christians do fall upon their knees as soon as they come into the church, and pray to God to prevent them by His grace and Spirit. And, that the most unlearned christian may not want words, the Church has provided a most excellent prayer, to be made use of before we begin any work of moment; and which all christians may learn, being so often repeated in the public service, as follows: "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favour," &c.

And here let me give you, and beg you to remember, one most excellent rule of a christian life,—never to undertake any business without praying to God, in this or some such prayer, to prevent and prosper you. Whoever conscientiously observes this rule, will be hindered from doing many things which the world counts innocent, and which must afterwards be repented of. For who *can*, who *dare*, say this prayer, and beg of God to prevent him with His gracious favour, and

further him with His help, when he is going to do a thing which he knows, or suspects, either to be unjust, unfit for a christian man to do, or displeasing to God?

Let us now return to the consideration of the public worship. And I must repeat it again, and beseech you to remember it, that the only way to have your persons and your prayers accepted is, to come before God with an *humble, penitent,* and *obedient heart.* It is for this reason you are put in mind, "that a broken and contrite heart God will not despise." And you have a convincing proof of this, in the person of the publican, mentioned by our Saviour; who, out of a deep sense of his sins and unworthiness, "durst not lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful unto me a sinner.*" Which holy indignation, and condemning himself after so penitent a manner, procured for him the pardon of his sins; the very greatest blessing *he* could, or *we* can, ask or obtain of God. [Luke 18. 13.]

On the other hand; if we present ourselves before God, after a careless, indecent manner, with a vain confidence and satisfaction that we are not as great sinners as some others, our very prayers will be turned into sin, and we shall leave the church without a *pardon,* and without a *blessing.* To prevent this, when you hear the *sentences* read with which the public service begins, *attend* to them with seriousness: and in order to stir up your devotion, apply them to yourself in some such short prayers as these following:

For example: if this sentence shall be read, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness," &c. say secretly to yourself; *Turn Thou me, O good Lord, and so shall I be turned.* Or, if this sentence should be read; "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses," &c. you may say in your heart; *It is of the Lord's mercies that my sins have not been my ruin.* Or suppose this sentence has been read; "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart," &c. you may say in your heart; *But most unfit is mine to be to God presented, until I have obtained His pardon for the many sins by which it has been defiled.* Or if this sentence shall be read; "Turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger," &c. say secretly; *God grant that I may never abuse* [Ezek. 18. 27.] [Dan. 9. 9, 10.] [Ps. 51. 17.] [Joel 2. 13.]

SERM. VI.

this goodness and patience of God, which is designed to lead me to repentance. While this sentence is reading; "I will [Luke 15. 18, 19] arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee," &c. think with yourself, with what an humble, penitent heart this poor prodigal said these words, and endeavour to possess your own heart with the same devout affections. Lastly, when this sentence shall be read; "If we say that we have no [1 John 1. 8, 9.] sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," &c. a devout and penitent soul will pour out some such secret ejaculation as this: *The very best of men have need of mercy and pardon; how much more such a miserable sinner as I am!* "I will acknowledge my sin unto God, and mine iniquities [Ps. 32. 5.] will I not hide."

By this method, you will keep your mind intent upon the great work you are about; you will go through the whole service with devotion; "you will pray with the understanding:" and you will accustom yourself to apply every scripture to your own case.

But be sure you take this consideration along with you; and I beseech you to remember it as long as you live; *that you are not going to make your address to God for yourself only, but for every christian in the whole world.* For, as we are all members of *that body* of which Jesus Christ is the head, we are every one of us bound (as we hope to meet in heaven) to pray for, and to do good to, every member of that body. Think seriously of this, and it will quicken your charity, and mightily stir up your devotion, when you consider, that you are going to pray for millions of millions of christians, and that millions of christians are praying for you; and that, as you sincerely pray for others, God will most surely hear their prayers for you. And then, with what satisfaction and comfort will you leave the church, when you consider that you have been a real benefactor to an infinite number of miserable christians; by praying for all that are in error, or want the necessary means of instruction; for all that labour under trials and afflictions; for all that are in pain of body or anguish of mind; for all that are in slavery, under persecution, in poverty, or in prison; for all that are under temptations, or in danger of falling into

despair; and lastly, for all sick and dying persons. Besides this, you have had an opportunity of shewing your gratitude, by praying, and praising God for all your benefactors; as also, of shewing your charity, by praying for your enemies; and lastly, of begging graces and blessings for all your friends and relations, and for all that have desired your prayers.

If any considerations will make a christian serious and devout at his prayers, surely these will: that he is doing a work the most pleasing to God; that he is going to do himself, and all his fellow christians, the greatest good that can be thought of.

Well then, with *these* dispositions, and with *these* views, you begin your prayers *in an* HUMBLE CONFESSION *of your* [Dan.9.20.] *own sins and the sins of all others;* without which none of our prayers will be accepted; for a sinner can make no prayer that will be heard, but for the grace of conversion only.

When the congregation are making this confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon their knees; if there be any so ill taught, or so ignorant of their duty, as wilfully to refuse to put themselves into this humble posture, one may, without any breach of charity, conclude—*that man* does not know himself to be a miserable sinner; or he does not consider, that his prayers will be rejected; or he does not believe, that hell-fire will one day be the portion of unpardoned sinners; if he did, he would think no posture too painful by which he might obtain God's pardon and blessing.

To proceed: after this confession follows THE ABSOLUTION; not to be repeated by you, but by the minister of God only; and in the name, and by the authority, of God.

Ignorant people may suggest, that we take upon us to *pardon sins,* which we acknowledge NONE BUT GOD CAN DO. But surely God can send *His* pardon, as well as a king can send *his,* by what hands He thinks fit. And if *He has com-* [2Cor.5.18.] *mitted this ministry of reconciliation to His own ministers* (as St. Paul assures us He has done); who will be so perverse as to refuse so great a mercy, though it come through the hands of a man like themselves?

Pray remember the behaviour of no less a man than King David; who thought himself happy that he could receive

SERM. VI.

2 Sam. 12. 13.

absolution by the mouth of his subject Nathan; who, upon his confession, declared, "God hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die."

God bestows His blessings of pardon and peace according to His own appointment. He has appointed His ministers to baptize you for the remission of sins: and in order to assure to you the pardon of your sins, they are ordained to administer to you the other holy Sacrament.

Jesus Christ empowered His ministers not only to pray for, but to give with effect, the blessings of peace and happiness, which none but God can give, to every son of peace, that is,

Luke 10. 6. to every person qualified to receive such a blessing. Even so, every christian, duly qualified by true repentance and faith unfeigned, may have the comfort of hearing his pardon pronounced by God's own ambassador, pursuant to Christ's own power and authority.

But that God may render this pardon, by the mouth of His minister, more effectual, every true penitent would do well to receive and apply it to himself in some such secret prayer as this following: *may this pardon, O Lord, fall upon my soul, and seal the forgiveness of all my sins!* This one would recommend again and again to every devout christian, as what would be attended with the greatest comfort and assurance of his pardon being sealed in heaven.

The next thing which we are directed to do is, to address our heavenly Father in a PRAYER *appointed by the* SON of GOD *Himself.* This consideration should oblige us always to say this prayer with the greatest attention, deliberation, devotion, and zeal; that God may hear us according to the full importance of this most comprehensive prayer.

And now we are qualified to praise God, and to give Him thanks for all His mercies; which we are to do in the following *Psalms* and *Hymns:* and pray take notice, that the Psalms are appointed to be read over no less than twelve times in every year, *for this great and good reason;* that we may learn (by hearing and repeating them so often) to pray to and praise God, in the very words or expressions of the Holy Ghost; which, to be sure, will always be most acceptable to the Divine Majesty.

Then follows a Lesson out of the OLD TESTAMENT. The

Old Testament was written in order to establish *the great article of a Divine Providence;* and to give men right notions of God's *glorious perfections,* of His *almighty power,* His *infinite wisdom,* His *justice, goodness,* and *truth.*

When the minister saith, Here beginneth the Lesson; say in your heart, God is going to speak to me; shall I not vouchsafe to hear Him with attention? God grant that I may hear, and understand, and bring forth fruit an hundred fold.

It is in these books, that we have an account of what has happened from the creation to the coming of Christ; and particularly of the two states of man, his *innocency* and his *fall.* That God having made man, He promised to make him happy for ever, if he would be obedient to His commands: but man, failing in this, forfeited all his right to eternal happiness, and became subject to sin and to death. That to convince us of His infinite *goodness, love,* and *mercy,* from the moment man fell, God promised a Redeemer, for Whose sake his repentance should be accepted, on condition he would live according to that light and reason which God had given him.

After this, men abusing their reason, and falling into idolatry, God gave them, by His servant Moses, written laws to walk by; and from time to time raised up prophets, either to explain the true meaning of those laws, or to foreshew what would be the sad consequence of their persisting to provoke God by their wicked lives.

And to convince men of His infinite *justice,* and *hatred of sin,* it appears in these books that He has punished sinners in all ages, without respect of persons; once in the destruction of the whole world, except eight persons; at another time, by fire and brimstone from heaven; and by infinite other sore judgments, by the *sword, famines, pestilence,* and *persecutions.*

All these things were written for our instruction; that we may profit by hearing them read; and that we may learn to *fear,* and *love,* and *obey,* this great and good God, Who can make us infinitely happy, or miserable beyond expression.

Remember therefore, I beseech you, our Saviour's words:

SERM. VI.

"If they hear not (if they mind not) Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." [Luke 16. 31.] So dreadful is the consequence of not attending to the Word of God when read in the Church.

After this follows *one of the most devout Hymns of Praise* that ever was made by man, to the praise of GOD the *Father, Son,* and *Holy Ghost,* to Whom you were dedicated in baptism; beginning with these words: "We praise Thee, O God," &c.

That you may join with the Church with greater devotion, remember what God hath declared; "Them that honour Me, I will also honour." [1 Sam. 2. 30.]

Then will be read the Second Lesson out of the NEW TESTAMENT. In attending to what you hear out of the New Testament, you will be convinced, that it was one and the same Spirit which was the Author of both the Old and New.

Prepare yourself to hear the history of Christ Jesus your Saviour, and the manner of your redemption, as truths on which your salvation depends. Our Saviour Himself gives us warning what will follow, if we do not mind these things: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for people who have an opportunity of hearing the Word of God, and despise it." [Matt. 10. 15.]

Here you have the terms of your salvation, and the example of your Saviour, set before you. Here you have an account of the Son of God, the promised Redeemer, taking our nature upon Him; instructing us what we must believe, and what we must do, to be saved; suffering what our sins had deserved; satisfying the justice, and restoring us to the favour of God.

And that no man, no, not the most unlearned christian, may be discouraged from reading and hearing the Scriptures, our Lord gives God thanks, for that He reveals these truths, and makes them easy to the humble, obedient, and willing christian. And indeed the Gospel does not only teach christians their duty, but also inspires them with grace to understand, and power to perform it. Matt. 11. 25. John 6. 63.

That therefore you may profit by the Word of God, remember and observe these two rules: first; apply what you

hear as spoken to yourself. This *command,* this *promise,* this *threatening,* this *reproof,* this *direction,* this *warning,* I will take to myself. And secondly; fail not to beg of God, at the end of every Lesson, that He may enable you to understand, and love, and obey His holy Word.

In this Word are contained ALL THE ARTICLES OF YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH; which, that we may remember them the better, they are all summed up in THE APOSTLES' CREED, which ought to be repeated with great deliberation. And if every one would secretly beg of God, in the words of the apostles, *Lord increase my faith,* at the end of the Creed, [Luke 17. 5.] God would most surely increase his faith, and it would become a sure shield against all the assaults of the devil.

After this, we proceed to make our prayers and supplications to God for the graces and blessings we stand in need of. For kings, and all that are in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives: for the ministers of God, who shew unto you the way of salvation; and to whom the word of reconciliation, and of life eternal, is committed: and lastly, for all estates and conditions of men, that our charity may render our prayers more acceptable to God.

The LITANY is a part of our service, which will be attended to, and joined in, by every devout christian, who fears the judgments of God, or fears for himself.

And pray do not think that those often repeated words, LET US PRAY, are said without reason. Every one knows for himself, how very apt our minds are to wander in prayer: and these words are designed, and should always put us in mind, TO WHOM WE ARE SPEAKING, that our thoughts may go along with our lips, when we speak to HIM Who knows our hearts.

You cannot but observe, that we conclude all our prayers with some such expression as *this,*—through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that we may ever remember that it is for *His* sake, and for what He has done and suffered for us, that God gives us any thing we pray for.

When the minister goes to the Altar, prepare to hear, with the greatest attention, the *Commandments of God,* which at your baptism you vowed to keep all the days of your life. As often as these are read, you have an opportunity of seeing

SERM. VI.

wherein you have offended against any of these commands, and of begging God's pardon for what is past, and His grace to observe them better for the time to come, in these most affecting words, which the Church has provided, *Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this Law;* which should never be hurried over, but said with the greatest devotion.

When the EPISTLE and GOSPEL are read, and you remember that they are portions of Sacred Scripture, taken out of the Book of your salvation, you will hear them with greater attention.

Sometimes you will hear the most instructive sermons or parables of Christ; at other times you will hear the miracles He wrought for the confirmation of our faith.

And, to encourage us to follow His blessed example of patience, humility, submission to the will of God, and disregard for this world, we have set forth, in the *Gospel,* His most sure promise of grace and consolation while we live, and of happiness eternal when we die. And to hinder us from growing secure and careless, we shall often and often hear in these Gospels the dreadful doom which *unconverted, hardened,* and *impenitent* sinners shall surely meet with in the next world.

At certain solemn seasons, you have a particular account of what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our redemption and salvation, that we may never forget His love.

And in the several *Epistles,* you will hear, every man his duty very particularly set down, in the words not of man, but (as they are indeed) the words of God.

And some part or other of this Word you will hear every Lord's day explained *in the sermon,* and pressed upon you, in order to enlighten the minds of the ignorant, to awaken the consciences of the careless and profane, and such, as hold the truth in unrighteousness. But then, as you hope to profit by sermons, you must come to church with an humble and teachable temper; submitting to receive *instruction, reproof,* and *advice,* from the person whom the providence of God has set over you.

If the SACRAMENT of the *Lord's Supper* is to be administered, and you lightly turn your back upon that holy Ordi-

nance; you must not expect, that God will hear any of the prayers that you have made. *Do this in remembrance of Me,* were the dying words of Jesus Christ. You refuse to obey this command (for such in truth it is); and yet hope that God, for His sake, will hear you when you call upon Him. [Luke 22. 19.]

Do not deceive yourself. It is by this Sacrament, that the subjects of Christ are distinguished from the subjects of Satan. Have a care, therefore, lest it happen to you as it did to the Egyptians; lest the destroying angel, finding you without the blood of the lamb, the mark of your high calling, should have power to destroy you. [Ex.12.13.]

Consider, that this Sacrament is to christians what the tree of life was to Adam in Paradise; it was to make him immortal; so that when he deprived himself of that food, he was left to his natural weakness, which ended in death, and misery till death. And whoever deprives himself of this bread of life will be left to themselves, to the power of Satan, and to death eternal.

Do but lay to heart, how many tears it cost St. Peter for a crime so near akin to this, and you will not lightly turn your back upon this Sacrament; it being in effect saying, *I am not one of Jesus Christ's disciples.* [Luke 22. 61, 62.]

And now the public service of the Church concludes with *a most solemn blessing,* pronounced by the priest of God.

That you may always dispose yourselves to receive *this blessing* with devotion and advantage, I will shew you the certain blessed fruits of doing so. In the book of Numbers, there is a special charge given to the priests, by God Himself, to bless the people. There is a special form for doing it; and there is a special blessing promised to follow upon the priest's blessing: *And I,* saith God, *will bless them.* [chap. 6. 22—27.]

In Deut. x. 8, it is expressly said, that God separated the tribe of Levi, *to bless in His name.* And accordingly, 2 Chron. xxx. 27, we have the priests blessing the people; and it is there added, "that their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to God's holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven."

Had the blessing of the priest under the Law such a good effect, and has not Jesus Christ given His ministers as great

SERM. VI.

a power? That would be to have very unworthy thoughts of the Gospel ministry indeed: a ministry to which, St. Paul
Cor. 5. 18. expressly tells us, God has in an especial manner committed the power of reconciling men to God.

I will set before you the devotion with which the people of God received the blessing of the priest; a pattern not to be despised. It is in the fiftieth chapter of Ecclesiasticus, at the 20th and 21st verses, you read as follows; "When they had finished the service, then the priest lifted up his hand over the whole congregation to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips; and they bowed themselves down to worship, that they might receive a blessing from the Most High." And a blessing most certainly every christian receives from the Most High, according as he is disposed for such a mercy, and as he has qualified himself by his devout behaviour in the service of God.

The public service being ended, a serious christian will not conclude that he has done all that is required of him. He will rather consider where he has been; what he has been doing; what he has heard; what he has prayed for. He will consider, that he has been at the house of God, where he has heard God speaking to him by His own minister. He will give God thanks for the helps and means He has vouchsafed him of knowing his duty, and of performing it. He will call to mind what he has heard, and beg of God that he may profit by it; that he may live as he has been taught, and as a christian ought to live. In short, he will not let the world take possession of his heart as soon as he comes out of the church, but will endeavour to edify his soul by some such thoughts and short petitions as *these:*

'I have been professing openly my faith in God the *Father, Son,* and *Holy Ghost,* to Whom I was dedicated in baptism. I have been told by His *own* minister, and out of his *own*
[1 Thess 4. 1.] Word, what my duty is; *how I ought to walk so as to please God.* I have been praying for such blessings as may make me happy while I live, and for such graces and virtues without which I shall be most miserable when I die. If I do not profit by these things, they will most surely rise up in judgment against me.

'To be so often told what will please and what will dis-

please God, and not to mind it: to know that He is terrible in judgment, and not to fear Him: to know that He is gracious and merciful, and not to love Him: to be so often put in mind, that God sees all my actions, and not to be afraid to offend Him: to pray so often, and so long for God's graces, without laying it to heart, that it must be my own fault if I do not obtain His grace and assistance to mend my life.

'What will this end in; if I pass one *Lord's day*, one *year*, after another, without growing better by the many *sermons* I hear; by the *prayers* offered so often to God for me; by the times appointed for the taking care of my soul? Is this the way of preparing for eternity,—for an eternity of happiness or misery? Shall I still continue to keep these thoughts out of my mind? Shall I shut my eyes, and not see the danger of being lost for ever? God forbid, will every one say, that has any grace: I will rather pray God to deliver me from hardness of heart and contempt of His Word. And since He has promised to hear the petitions of such as ask in His Son's name, I will, for His sake, beseech Him to pardon my imperfections and indevotions. And I will endeavour for the time to come, that my devotion and zeal shall be answerable to my wants. And then, I am sure, I shall return home with a blessing.'

I pray God we may all do so, as often as we meet here to worship God; and that our behaviour, when out of the church, may be such as becomes the true disciples of Jesus Christ.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory.

SERMON VII.

THE TRUE REASON WHY PEOPLE DO NOT PROFIT BY SERMONS.

May I ever read and preach Thy Word, O God, with the same spirit with which it was written. Give me, and all that shall hear me, a lively sense of the almighty power of a true faith, to enable us to overcome all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil: and purify all our hearts by this faith, that we may profit by Thy Word, be converted and saved, through Thy mercy in Jesus Christ. Amen.

HEB. iv. 2.

The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

AMONGST the great number of christians, who every Lord's day hear the Word of God *read, explained,* and *preached;* how many are there, who by their lives shew plainly that they do not *profit,* are not *bettered,* by it!

This is a melancholy consideration; and therefore it will be necessary that you should know, *what is the true reason why people do not profit by sermons.* We are told in the words just read to you, THAT IT WAS FOR WANT OF FAITH.

See Deut. 1. 32, &c.

God had promised the children of Israel the land of Canaan, for an inheritance for themselves and their posterity. They were told that they would meet with difficulties, and so they would not go forwards; that is, they would not take God's word, that He would deliver them out of all the difficulties and dangers they should meet with. This highly displeased God; and, for a punishment of their unbelief, they were none of them who thus distrusted the promise of God, not one was suffered to set a foot in that good land.

Now this is the case of too many christians. The blessed God would have all His creatures enjoy that happiness for

which they were created. As matters now stand with us, we cannot possibly be happy, till our natures are mended, and changed for the better. We foresee some difficulties in doing this; we will not give credit to the word and promise of God, that He will make us able to overcome *all* difficulties, and sufficiently reward us when we have done so.

What will this end in? Why; just as it did with the children of Israel. They never saw the land of Canaan, by reason of their unbelief. And, as sure as they did not enter into the promised land, so sure shall not any christian see the heavenly Canaan, *the kingdom of heaven,* who will not attend to, and give credit to, God's *Word,* His *promises,* and *threatenings,* and order their lives accordingly.

Now, this *Word,* and these *promises,* and *threatenings,* are read and preached every Lord's day. How then comes it to pass, that the generality of christians are not bettered by it? The answer is the text just now read: "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

You see, christians, how much depends upon a *true* and *saving faith,* even no less than your eternal *salvation* or *damnation.*

It would be an high presumption for any minister of Christ to say this, without authority from God's Word. Hear then what our Lord Christ saith, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned:" that is, he that believeth the Gospel, which contains God's mercy to man, and man's duty to God, and is *baptized,* and promiseth and yieldeth sincere obedience to that Gospel; every such person, man or woman, shall certainly be saved. And *as* certainly, every one, man or woman, who *believeth not* that Gospel, which also containeth *God's wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousnes of men;* whoever receiveth not this Gospel, nor believeth it when preached to him, *shall be damned.* Mark 16. 15, 16. Rom. 1. 18.

Now, if these two concerning truths do not awaken every one who hears them, it must be for want of attending to them; or, in the words of the text, *for want of faith in them that hear them.*

SERM. VII.

But to awaken, and to cure us of this want of faith, this must be the work of Thy grace, O blessed God! To Thee we must apply for grace to hear Thy Word with seriousness and attention; and for faith to profit by what we hear.

We are assured, that without faith it is impossible to please God. We are assured also, that a saving faith is the gift of God. And this gift and grace will not be denied to any one who begs it of God with a desire to be bettered by it. So that every one is without excuse, who does not hear the Word preached, and profit by it.

The ministers of God are appointed by Him, to read to you and to explain the truths of the Gospel. To make Jesus Christ and His Gospel known unto men. To endeavour to convince them of the danger they are in without a redeemer. To shew men what they must do to be saved. To beg of God to bless their instructions. To endeavour to awaken the consciences of the careless, and to make them feel, if possible, the diseases they labour under, and the wounds which sin hath made in their souls; that they may more cheerfully embrace the means which the mercy of God hath provided for their recovery.

For God is so wonderfully good and merciful to His unhappy creatures, as to promise, that He will pardon the greatest sinners who shall repent and return to their duty, and will make them happy for ever.

When these things are heard and not minded, as if people had no concern in them, no wonder they do not profit by our sermons: for conversion and salvation are not always the effect of sermons, but the grace of God accompanying them, and the disposition by which they are heard and received; namely, if they are heard with pleasure, attended to with seriousness, &c.

Now, to keep these merciful truths in your minds; to persuade you to attend to them; to give credit to them; not to ruin yourselves by not minding them: these are the end of all our sermons. And may God give His blessing to them, and to all that hear them with faith and attention.

In order to this, you must first know what that faith is, the want of which is the occasion of people's *not profiting by sermons*. Why; in few and plain words, faith is the believ-

ing, the giving entire credit to, the truths which God has made known to us in His holy Word. And this faith is to be attained by *hearing, attending* to, and *dwelling* upon, these truths; and begging of God so to open and set them upon our hearts, that we may not be easy, till, by God's grace, we live like people who sincerely do believe such truths.

Perhaps you will say, we *do believe* the truths of the Gospel. Pray have a care of deceiving yourselves. Remember the words of the Apostle, *The very devils believe and tremble.* James 2. 19. They know every article of the Creed to be true, and this makes them tremble.

You will wonder, when I tell you, that there are men in one respect even worse than devils; they are such as know and dare not deny, the truths of the Gospel, and yet *do not tremble,* nor are they afraid for themselves.

But you will perhaps ask—if the devils believe, why may not they be saved? Why; *their case is this:* they do indeed know, that every article of the Creed is true; but they are so hardened in sin and pride, that they will not ask God's *pardon,* His *grace,* and *help,* to restore them to His favour. And, whether people will believe it or not, *this is the case of all wicked men,* with this only difference, *that they are yet in a state of trial* (which those evil spirits are past, and have lost); whereas the wickedest of men in this life are still in a *state of trial,* and in a possibility of being saved, if they can but humble themselves before God, *acknowledge their iniquities, and that they have transgressed against the Lord their God;* if they will but beg of God, of His great mercy, and for His Son's sake, to *increase their faith, to awaken their consciences,* and to give them the graces they stand in need of, with full purpose of heart of doing what they believe they ought to do. All such, though their sins be never so many and great, are yet in a state and way of salvation and happiness.

By this you see, christians, that there is something more necessary to salvation than *barely believing the truths of the Gospel.* These you may know, and believe, and yet be ruined for ever. Every serious christian, therefore, will be desirous to know what more is necessary to make our belief *a saving faith.* And may God grant, that we may so explain this heavenly grace, that not one of us may have rest in his soul,

SERM. VII.

till we obtain of God (for faith is the gift of God), till we obtain such a faith as will enable us to profit by the truths of the Gospel, when proposed and explained to us by God's ministers.

In order to this, you shall in the first place hear such truths as are proper to awaken men, and to convince them, *That the care of their souls ought to be the great concern of their whole lives.*

Such truths are these that follow:

First; that all men are by nature in such a condition, as will certainly end in their everlasting misery, if they are left to themselves, and to their own desires and choices. For, being a race of sinful creatures, and prone to evil, an holy God cannot take pleasure in them to make them happy, until their corrupt nature be mended and changed for the better.

Now, God knows, that of ourselves we cannot do this, if we are left to ourselves and the weakness of our own corrupt nature and reason; He hath therefore, at the instance and for the merits of His own Son, promised to help us, to renew our corrupt nature, to pardon what is past, and to assist us for the time to come to become such as He can take pleasure in.

In order, therefore, to dispose us to close with this great goodness of God; to make us afraid for ourselves; to humble us; and let us see, and abhor ourselves, for having broken laws so holy, just, and good, and how liable we have made ourselves to His just indignation; God has given us numberless instances, in His holy Word, of His dreadful displeasure against such persons and places as have broken His laws without fear, and without repentance; that all sinners may see what they must expect in this or the next world, or in both.

God has also made known to us, that this is not the world we were made for; that we are here only in a state of trial, that our corrupt nature may be mended, and we made fit for a better life and state when we die. That if this is not done before we die, we shall be ruined for ever.

To prevent this, God, Who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge and belief of the truth, has sent His only Son from heaven, to let us know His love and pleasure, and what is necessary to our eternal happiness.

And His blessed Son has assured us, that He has made our peace with God; that He will give us all the assistance we can want to make us acceptable to God; that God will make us happy for ever, if we shall strive to do our best to live as He has taught us; and that we shall be miserable, beyond what we can imagine, if we despise or neglect these offers of mercy.

These are truths made known to us in God's Word, for the direction of our lives, for the confirmation of our faith, and for the trial of our obedience.

To fix these truths in your minds and memories is, or should be, the end of all our sermons. And our Lord has foretold us, that it is Satan who tempts men to neglect, or forget them, that he may ruin their souls.

People do not consider this power of the devil over the hearts of those that do not fear God, nor are afraid for themselves. But pray hear what our Saviour saith: "The seed sown is the Word of God. If those that hear are careless, and not concerned for themselves, then cometh the devil, and taketh the Word out of their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved." So that you see, it is the great work of Satan to make you hear sermons and God's Word read to you with indifference: and that this is one of the *true reasons why people do not profit by sermons.*

Luke 8. 11, &c.

SERMON VIII.

THE MISERY OF NOT ATTENDING TO THE WORD AND MINISTERS OF GOD.

O important subject! Grant, O God, that I myself may see, and be able to teach others, the danger of living in any known sin; of being diverted from considering our latter end, by the cares, pleasures, or other idols of this world. Let this truth be ever present with us, that we have but a short time to live, and an eternal interest depending; that we may not squander one moment of this short life in that which will not profit us in the day of necessity, and the hour of death. O let us never lose the sight of that important hour, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PROV. v. 11—14.

See Matt. 10. 14; 13. 3, 51; 28. 18, 19; Mark 4. 9; Luke 10. 16; 11. 28; John 20. 21; Acts 13. 48; 20. 28; 1 John 4. 6.

And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed [that is, when you come to die]; *and say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me?*

THIS, good christians, is what I would endeavour to prevent; that when you come to die, your consciences may not reproach you for having not attended to the Word of God read or preached to you; for having not obeyed the voice of your teachers; for the great number of sermons, admonitions, and reproofs, that have been lost upon you; for turning a deaf ear to those who were appointed to instruct you, and despising their reproof.

You hear, in the words just read to you, what a person, directed by the Spirit of God, assures you will be one of the great things that will torment and trouble you when you come to die, if you have led a careless and ungodly life. That you will most sadly lament your perverseness, your

folly, and madness; and wish, with all your soul, that you had heard with patience the threatenings of the Gospel, and that you had taken the good advice of such as, out of pity to your souls, had forewarned you of the ruin you were bringing upon yourselves, by disregarding the Word of God, and the truths of the Gospel.

Believe it, christians, this is the very beginning of sin and of ruin; when truths of the greatest concern to us are not minded; when the means of knowledge, of grace, of faith, and of salvation, are slighted.

Consider, that *Preaching* is an ordinance of God, and an ordinance on which depends, in some measure, the salvation of the world; for how shall they hear, how shall they believe, without a preacher? Rom. 10. 14.

This ordinance therefore neglected or despised, this sin continued in, how often does it provoke God to leave men to themselves, to withdraw from them His graces and His Spirit? Upon which Satan takes them under his government, and then *must* follow sin and misery.

You will take notice, that this was the very case of Judas. How many concerning truths did he hear from his Lord and Master? especially this one so often repeated, *take heed and beware of covetousness.* This was lost upon him, because he would not lay it to heart; and you all know what followed. The words of the text were most dreadfully fulfilled upon him; he mourned at the last, and left this world in despair. [Luke 12. 15.]

Christians should consider, that this *may* be their own case; that it certainly *will* be so, if they hate to be informed and reproved, if they obey not the voice of their teachers.

Now, the things which I would desire you to take notice of, as implied in the text, are these following: 1st; That all christians, even the most knowing, will often want to be put in mind of their duty; to be taught, to be told of their faults, their infirmities, and backslidings. 2ndly; That God has appointed certain persons, who, at the peril of their own souls, are to do this—*to watch for your souls as they that must give an account.* 3rdly; That such as neglect or despise this appointment of God, or the ministers ordained for this purpose, will have reason to repent of it sadly when they come to die, and to consider what a life they have led, and Heb. 13. 17.

SERM. VIII.

what sins they have fallen into, for want of hearkening to the voice of their teachers.

These truths, one would hope, you do not want to be convinced of.

Every one for himself knows, how very apt we are to forget our duty, and the vows that are upon us, and to fall into sins which we have repented of; how often we want to be awakened into a sense of the danger we are in, and of the hope set before us.

Every body, who knows any thing of christianity, knows likewise, that there are persons appointed by the Holy Ghost, as overseers, and to feed the flock of Christ; to teach, to reprove, to rebuke with all authority, to instruct such as oppose themselves, that they may recover them out of the snare of the devil.

Lastly; every christian, who is acquainted with the Gospel, must know the sad doom of such as *may* know the will of God, and will not hear or mind it, nor order their life accordingly: "That it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for such people," who do not consider, that when they despise the persons, the ministry, or the doctrine, of such as are ordained to instruct them, THEY DESPISE NOT MAN, BUT GOD: so saith St. Paul expressly, 1 Thess. iv. 8.

[Matt. 10. 15.]

Taking it therefore for granted, that you believe the preaching of the Gospel to be one of those necessary means of salvation, without which you would be either altogether ignorant of your duty, or soon forget it,—without which you would live and die in sin, and without hopes of mercy; taking this for granted, I will take some pains (and I hope it will not be lost) to convince you,

First; Of the infinite danger of living in any known sin, lest death should surprise and send us to a miserable eternity.

Secondly; That the way not to be surprised by death is, to have death much in our thoughts.

Thirdly; The great care we should take not to be diverted from the thoughts of death, by the cares, pleasures, or amusements of the world.

Fourthly; That when we come to die, we shall have very

different thoughts of these idols of the world, than what we are apt to have at present.

Fifthly; That the ill use and loss of our time, which cannot be recalled, will then be the most tormenting thought to those who now lead a careless and a sinful life.

Lastly; That, whatever they think of it, this will most surely be the fate and punishment of those who refuse to hear and obey the voice of their teachers.

I. In the first place, pray consider with me *the infinite danger of living in any* KNOWN SIN. Now, whoever does so lives in rebellion against his Maker, one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. He most ungratefully offends the best Father and Friend, the most indulgent Prince and Lawgiver, Who commands His subjects no thing but what is absolutely necessary to make them happy; nor forbids them any thing but what would hurt and ruin them. You despise the patience and long-suffering of God, Who can deprive you of life whenever He pleases, and continues you in life only that you may be converted and saved. You are in danger of provoking God to withhold His grace, without which you can never repent, never be saved. You, in effect, renounce being a subject of God, and choose to be a slave to Satan. You are in the direct way to atheism—even to wish there were no God to call you to an account.

This is the very condition of every one who lives in the practice of any *known sin;* or who, when he perceives that he has offended God, does not immediately repent of it, and resolve to do so no more. And whosoever shall be surprised by death in this state has nothing to expect but a miserable eternity.

II. This should convince us of *the great necessity and advantage of having the* THOUGHTS OF DEATH *much at heart.*

If christians would but seriously consider, that the sentence of death is already passed upon them (as it really is upon every one of us), they would be apt to think *now* just as they would do when that sentence comes to be put in execution. Why should I set my heart upon a world where I am to continue so very short a while, and where I am sure never to meet with true satisfaction? What if God, seeing me very intent upon the world, and setting up my rest here,

SERM. VIII.

should say unto me, as He has done to many others, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee?" What then will this unrighteous gain profit me? How bitter will the remembrance of these unlawful pleasures be to me? With what pain and grief shall I then part with these riches, these pleasures, these idols, which I am now so fond of?

[Luke 12. 20.]

Let me, therefore, beg of you to suppose you were now lying at the point of death.

Would you, for the sake of leaving a better estate behind you, would you take advantage of that poor man's necessities; of this poor man's ignorance? Would you recommend to your children the way of life you yourself have led? Would you not rather tell them, multitude of business has ruined me; it has made me forget myself, my God, my duty to both, and the end of my being sent into the world.

Or if you have led a careless, useless, idle life, would you not charge your children, as they hope to be saved, *not to follow your example?* Would you not bid them, over and over again, remember the sentence passed upon the unprofitable servant, "Cast him into outer darkness."

[Matt. 25. 30.]

Or suppose yourself surprised by the approach of death in the midst of a life of pleasures, would you not tell your children how sad and bitter the remembrance of such a life is, when one comes to die? That you have, by leading such a life, lived in an utter forgetfulness of God; done little or no good in your generation; lost all the principles of a christian life; so fixed your heart and soul on these vanities, that you cannot raise your thoughts to God, nor pray to Him, in this time of distress, with any hopes of being heard?

Lastly; would not the most learned man, upon setting death before his eyes, confess the folly and impertinence of every study which does not tend to better our neighbour or ourselves, to glorify God, to mend the corruption of our nature, and to restore us to the image of God; which does not serve to furnish the understanding with heavenly wisdom, and the soul with devout affections?

In short, death will come, whether we think of it or not; the time, it is true, is uncertain; but this we are sure of, that the reason why the unfruitful tree was not immediately cut

down was, that it might (if spared a little longer) bring forth fruit worthy of its place in the vineyard.

III. This shews *the great care we ought to take* NOT TO BE DIVERTED FROM THE SIGHT OF DEATH, *by a supine negligence, or by the business or pleasures of this world.*

Few people imagine, that they shall ever forget they must die; and yet how many live to find themselves deceived, and never think of preparing for death till they come within the sight of eternity? It is then indeed they will see their error; but who will assure them that it is not then too late? It is for this reason, our Lord has made it one of the express duties of christianity, *to watch continually*, lest that day overtake us unawares; because so very much depends upon it. He has also forewarned us, in the parable of the seed sown among thorns, what are the things which will certainly divert us from the thoughts of what must come hereafter; assuring us, that an heart possessed with the love of *riches*, or filled with the *cares*, the *pleasures*, or *idols* of this world, is utterly incapable of entertaining any lasting thoughts of another life. [Luke 21. 34, 36.] [Luke 8. 14.]

It is true, a form of religion and piety, and some serious thoughts and purposes, and even good works, may for a time subsist with a life of sensual pleasures, worldly amusements, and the love of riches; but at last, He, Who knows what is in man, assures us, that these will choke every grain of good seed which His Spirit had sown in our hearts.

Let us therefore be persuaded, by all that is dear to us, not to lose the sight of death, by diversions which will signify nothing to us when we come to die, but only to torment us.

IV. For, *when we come to die, we shall have very different thoughts of all these idols of the world, than what we are apt to have at present.*

You have seen a child extremely fond of his play-things, and most impatient to part with them: an hour after, perhaps, he is taken ill, and you strive to divert him by the thing he was just before so very fond of; but all in vain: the very sight of them offends him. Why now, as sure as we live, this will be the case of every soul of us, if we will set our hearts upon things which will not satisfy or comfort us when we come to die.

SERM. VIII.

You are young, and you think a serious temper is not necessary. Depend upon it, you will not think so, if God shall visit you, and bring you within the sight of death. You will then see the folly and madness of a life spent in sin and vanity.

You are at present fond of what you call pleasant company; you will not believe it, that a time will come when you will cry out, would to God I had never seen those unhappy people who tempted me to an idle life, which made me forget myself, my God, and especially my latter end!

As for sensual pleasures, of every kind, it will be found true of them what the wise man said of wine, "At the last they will sting like a serpent, and bite like an adder." Their wound will be mortal.

[Prov. 23. 32.]

You lead a useless life; and you make your mind easy with such thoughts as these: I have enough to live on, and why should I trouble myself with labour and care? I will tell you why; for this reason, amongst others; because, when you come to die, such a scripture as this may come to torment your soul, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

[Matt. 25. 30.]

To avoid this sentence, there are others so very intent upon the world, that they make a little religion serve their turn; nor will they give themselves time to hear, what their teachers would tell them, that *this* is not the world they were made for; and that they will have quite other thoughts of this world when they come in sight of that which is to come, and look back upon the little they have done towards preparing for a life which must never end.

V. It is then *the* ILL USE *and* LOSS OF TIME *will be the torment of their souls, who now lead a careless or a sinful life.*

Most people in health are apt, too apt, to flatter themselves that they have time enough before them; and that, as long as they live, their salvation will be in their own hands. This delusion has been the ruin of many a soul. "I say unto you (saith our Lord), many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able." This is fair warning to such as will be making experiments, how long they may go on in a careless way of living, depending upon their own purposes, and the goodness and grace of God, whenever they shall think fit to ask for it; not

[Luke 13. 24.]

considering that a time *may* come, that a time *will* come, when by a just judgment, they shall not be able to make one step towards their salvation, because they despised the long-suffering and goodness of God, which was designed to lead them to repentance.

Christians do not consider, as they should do, that we are in this life in a state of trial; that this trial is for eternity; and that as we behave ourselves well or ill in this life, it will be well or ill with us for ever.

He that lays this to heart, will never think his time a burden; will never seek for ways to get it off his hands; will never imagine that he may spend it as he pleaseth; will never live as if he had nothing to do.

Now, that you may set a true value upon the time which God allows us, in order to have our corrupt nature mended, and to fit us for heaven, do but represent to your minds one, who when he comes to die, and looking backwards, can see nothing that he has done but what must render him unworthy of the favour of God; who has done little or no good in his generation; who has done a great deal of evil, and has no longer time to repent of it, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; who has done wrong to his neighbour, and has no time to make restitution; who is surprised in a course of sin, in the midst of worldly cares or pleasures, in an utter forgetfulness of God, and the duty he owes to Him.

One cannot but tremble, when we but suppose such a case as this, lest it should be yours, or mine, or any christian's when he comes to lie upon his death-bed.

And yet it *may* be so, and it really *will* be so, if we neglect the means of grace ordained by God to keep us from bringing this ruin upon ourselves.

VI. Particularly, *if christians refuse or neglect to hear and to obey* THE VOICE OF THEIR TEACHERS.

Most people are apt to believe they know their duty as well as those that are ordained to instruct them. And the truth is, the duties of christianity are so plain and reasonable, that the most unlearned need not perish in a christian country for want of knowledge. How then comes it to pass, that so many christians are in the certain way of perdition? The reason is plain; they do not attend and hearken to their

SERM. VIII.

teachers, with that seriousness they ought to do, who would ever and anon put them in remembrance of what *must* follow their disobedience.

People know their duty; but they are, the very best of men, but too apt to forget it. They believe the penalty; but are diverted, too often, from laying it to heart. Worldly cares and business, sensual pleasures, and other amusements, are the thorns mentioned by our Lord, which choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Besides this, our corrupt nature is very unwilling to dwell upon such amazing subjects as must of necessity give great uneasiness to people's minds, who are engaged in any sinful way. They will avoid, they will shut out, the thoughts of death and judgment, if possible, out of their very memory.

And therefore our gracious Lord, Who knows what is in man, and the terrible consequence of such obstinacy, has appointed His ministers, who, at the peril of their own souls, shall ever and anon bring these things to your remembrance; and press you, as you value your souls, to dwell upon them; and as often as you forget them, so often to sound them in your ears, until, by the grace of God, you order your life accordingly, and bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life.

And they that neglect to hear these truths from their teachers will most certainly mourn at the last, and say, [Prov.5.12.] "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;" when they come to see what their negligence has ended in.

How such negligence *does* end, the same inspired writer tells us in the following verses: they will be forced to con- [ver. 14.] fess, I WAS ALMOST IN ALL EVIL. And the observation is certainly most just, *That the profanation of the Lord's day, and the neglect of the ordinances then administered, is the beginning of all evil;* and the greatest criminals have been forced to confess this at the last, when their eyes have been opened upon the sight of death and judgment, and what must follow.

And let no christian, even the most knowing, be so con- Rom. 1. 16. 1 Cor. 1. 18, 21. ceited as to think he stands not in need of instruction from his teachers, after what the Apostle has declared, "That the

preaching of the Gospel is the power of God unto the salvation of them that hear and believe." And "that it pleaseth God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Intimating, that God has annexed the grace of conversion and salvation, in a great measure, to the preaching of the Gospel, to them who close with this ordinance, who esteem, and are sensibly affected with it, and endeavour and pray to be bettered by it. Rom. 1. 16. 1 Cor. 1. 18, 21.

And they that imagine that they know their duty, and need no teachers, will however stand in need of being put in mind both of their duty and danger, which the best of men are too apt to forget, and fall into the sins they have repented of.

And one most necessary grace they surely want (who think they want not to be instructed), and that is, *the grace of humility*, the want of which (or else they understand little of their duty) will shut them out of heaven.

And now, good christians, if you have attended to what has been said upon this subject, you will, I hope, be disposed to come to some such resolutions as these following:

'I will no longer flatter myself, that my time is in my own power; this short and uncertain time of life is my time of trial, of grace, and of fitting myself for heaven and happiness: how long it will last, God only knows, and therefore, through His grace, I will not let it slip and lose it. I will thank God for His patience in waiting so long for the fruits of His graces; and beg of Him to enable me to bring forth such fruit as His mercy and goodness will accept of. And I will endeavour, by a sincere repentance and an holy life, to prevent the sad reproaches of an awakened conscience, when I shall have no more time to do any thing towards making my peace with God.

'It is not now a question amongst christians, as it was amongst heathens,—what will become of us when we die? Our Lord Christ came down from heaven to let us know this, and that death infallibly sends us to a much better, or much worse place, than that we are now in. And, therefore, I will make it one part of my daily prayers, that God may not suffer me to forget my latter end, and what will follow. I see the advantage it would be to myself, and to the world, if we were often put in mind of this by those that are ordained to instruct

SERM. VIII.

us. It would teach us more than we are aware of; it would tie up our hands from *injustice* and *oppression*, and our hearts from *malice*, from every *evil thing*, from every *sinful pleasure*, which we shall then go to account for.

'I will, therefore (will every serious christian say), I will bless God for the pastors He has appointed to put us in remembrance of these things; and I will endeavour to profit by their instructions.

'I see plainly, that every thing conspires to make us lose the remembrance of the dangers that encompass us. The pleasures we are so fond of are only an art against thinking of death. The cares of the world, and the love of worldly things, are only a device of Satan to make us set up our rest here. Every vice we are fond of, every sin we commit, makes us still more unwilling to think of death. What then would become of us, if it were nobody's duty to shew us whither our steps will certainly lead us? In one word, we should live, as we speak, by chance; we should never seriously consider what we came into the world for; what we are a doing; whither we are a going.

'I will not look upon the instructions of the ministers of God, as the words of men, but (as they are indeed) grounded upon the Word of God, and, as such, I will hearken to them. And I will hope and depend upon it, His blessing will go along with them, if it is not my own fault. *They watch for our souls as they that must give an account.* What a mournful account will they have to give of those that will not hear their instructions? And what a mournful end will they make *who shall despise their reproof?*'

[Heb. 13. 17.]

[Prov. 1. 30.]

"Horrible (saith the wise man), horrible will be the end of the unrighteous: they have no hope, no comfort in the day of trial. But the righteous hath hope even in his death."

[Prov. 14. 32.]

These are the thoughts which will support his departing soul:

'I have obeyed the voice of my teachers, and inclined mine ear to them that instructed me; and their instructions have not been in vain. They often put me in mind of the thoughts I should have when I should come to die; and these thoughts made me more careful of my duty, and kept me from a thousand evils. The return of every Lord's day brought along

with it its especial blessing; either some advice, or some reproof; some duty I had forgot, or some sin I had unwarily fallen into. These I received as messages from God, and ordered my life accordingly; and now I have the comfort of doing so, when I most stand in need of it.'

Who would not wish to make such an end? And surely it is in the power of every soul of us, through the grace of God, to make such an end. Than which no sight upon earth is so charming, so desirable, as to see a dying man cheerful, and a soul departing with comfort, with a certain prospect of a blessed resurrection.

O God! grant that this may be the case of myself, and of every one that hears me. That we may love and attend to the Word and ministers of God. That we may live in the fear of God, and die in His favour, for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory.

SERMON IX.

THE SHAME AND DANGER OF BEING CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CHRISTIANITY.

EZEKIEL xliii. 10.

See Isaiah 58. 1; Prov. 30. 12; Tit. 1. 16; Matt. 20. 16; Rom. 2. 28; 9. 6; Jer. 6. 16; Rev. 2. 5, 9.

Thou Son of Man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

THE last eight chapters of Ezekiel have respect unto the state of the Gospel, and unto the New Jerusalem mentioned in the Revelations, as appears from the forty-seventh chapter, and from the name of the city JEHOVAH SHAMMAH; that is, God is there.

[Ezek. 48. 35.]

The Holy Spirit having very particularly described the temple and its ordinances, at the tenth verse He commands the prophet to shew that description to the house of Israel, that is, in a spiritual sense, to the Christian Church, *that they may measure,* that is, take especial notice of, *the pattern, and be ashamed of their iniquities.*

Now, whatever was written afore-time was written for our instruction, especially what was purposely designed for the use of the Church of Christ. This then being by the Holy Ghost commanded as a very proper method of convincing people of their error, *to shew them the pattern they ought to imitate,* that they may be ashamed when they see with their own eyes how sadly they come short of it; I shall therefore follow this direction as far as that good Spirit shall enable me, and set before you, first, *the pattern which christians ought to follow; what they ought to be.* And then, secondly, *the manner how they ought to imitate or follow this pattern.*

By which I would hope to convince such as have any degree of seriousness or concern for their souls, *that as far as*

they come short of this pattern, so far they will certainly come short of that happiness which God has promised His faithful servants.

Now, in order to do this more effectually, we shall consider,

First, What is the great design of the Gospel:

Secondly, What means God has ordained for making that design effectual:

Thirdly, What is required on our part towards bringing this design about.

A plain account of these things will shew christians to themselves. And when they see, how little they are affected with God's gracious design for their good; how little they have complied with the means ordained for bringing it about; and how very indifferently they have performed the duties required of them; they may be ashamed of their iniquities, or be left without excuse.

I. And first; THE GREAT DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL is, in the Apostle's words, "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." That their eyes being enlightened with saving truth, they may see the wonderful goodness of God to mankind, in offering them *happiness* eternal upon the most favourable conditions; that being made sensible of this, they may give glory to God, and shew forth His praise by fruits worthy of such a favour. [Acts 26. 18.]

And truly, the favour was *so great,* that mankind would hardly have believed it, had not God sent His Son into the world, to assure them, that although they are sinners, and that as such He *cannot* take pleasure in them, yet that He is ready to be reconciled to all such as, being sensible and weary of their bad condition, are willing to accept deliverance upon the terms He has prescribed, and are content to be governed by such laws as *He* knows to be necessary to fit them for *that happiness* which He designs for them.

And, that they may not be at a loss to know how *that happiness* is to be attained; what are the duties required of us; and how we may be able to perform them; God, by His Son, has given us a full and plain account of what is expected from us; upon what terms He will pardon us; and how we may be enabled to do what He requires of us.

To this end, He has appointed certain ordinances, to the

SERM. IX.

serious observers of which He has promised His infallible blessing. He has also appointed an order of men, whose business it *shall be,* to teach and to explain these things; to exhort christians not to neglect such offers of mercy; and to administer those ordinances, which He has appointed for enabling them to overcome all the difficulties they can possibly meet with.

And that men may not, at their peril, set light by these ordinances, and those that administer them, (because the ordinances are plain, and because they that administer them are men of like passions with themselves,) God hath expressly declared, that they that despise *them,* despise *Him,* for by *Him* they are sent: and that such as will not lay hold of the means of grace which He has ordained, must not expect His assistance in this life, or His favour in the next, but shall be punished for ever, for abusing so great goodness.

[Luke 10. 16.]

The truth of all which the Son of God sealed with His most precious blood; that men might not have any pretence to question the truth of these things, or to slight them.

And to awaken them into a sense of the hazard they run, if they should be so perverse as to despise that goodness which should lead them to repent, God has made known to the world this concerning truth, *that He will call all men to an account;* "and that they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire." And that thus it will be, though all the world should be so stupid as not to believe or mind it.

[Matt. 25. 41,46; John 5. 29.]

This is the design of the Gospel; *this* is the christian's great concern; *this* is his work.

Let us now consider, how this gracious design affects the generality of christians.

One would expect, that when life and death are set before people, there would be no difficulty with them, which they should choose. That they would be very desirous to be informed what will be expected from them; and be very thankful to those whom God has appointed to inform them, and to be the ministers of their reconciliation with God: and lastly, one would expect a general concern and seriousness, wherever these things are believed.

But, alas! the very contrary to all this is *matter of fact.*

There are but few, in comparison, that give themselves the trouble of laying these things to heart at all. And, therefore, the generality of christians have no *taste*, no *sense* of, no *value* for, the kindness and love of God, held forth to us in this dispensation.

It is true, all that live amongst christians cannot but hear and *know something* of these things. But then, the corrupt nature of man, which cannot bear to be restrained, strives to pervert the design of God and the Gospel according to the disposition in which it finds them.

They that are *atheistically disposed* think they see objections enough not to believe it. Of them that *do* believe and receive the Gospel, very many have only the *form of godliness*, but know nothing of the *power* thereof. Many *hold the truth in unrighteousness;* many run into sinful pleasures; others suffer the cares of the world to take up all their thoughts and time; while others, who yet think their time innocently spent, are engaged in studies which have no relation to the *one thing needful.* All these, however, are moved by the very same secret spring, namely, *the satisfaction men find in forgetting themselves* and the design of the Gospel, which is to make us holy, that we may be happy. [2 Tim. 3. 5.] [Rom. 1. 18.]

And this is the reason, that the name of Christ, as the Apostle speaks, (that is, the Christian Religion,) is blasphemed by unbelievers, because of the careless and bad lives of christians; of such christians as are in danger of being shut out of heaven, for being as bad as infidels. [Rom. 2. 24.]

But because we shall be better able to judge, *by coming to particulars,* how far we come short of our pattern, we will,

II. In the second place, take a view of *the means which God has ordained for making the design of the Gospel effectual for the salvation of mankind.* And these are, *the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments.*

And first; forasmuch as "without faith it is impossible to please God," God has therefore given us His Holy Word, as the most powerful means of begetting and increasing in us *that faith* which will *save us,* by bringing us to the knowledge and belief of God, His attributes and perfections. For instance: that He is *infinite in goodness,* and therefore to be *loved* above all things; that He is infinitely *just* and *powerful,* [Heb. 11. 6.]

SERM. IX.

and therefore to be *feared;* that His word is *true* from everlasting, that therefore His promises may be depended on with the greatest confidence; that He is *merciful,* and that He is *severe; kind* and *merciful* to such as strive to please Him, and *dreadfully severe* to such as despise His goodness and break His laws.

This is the *foundation of our faith;* this is the *mighty treasure* we enjoy; a blessing which the heathen world are strangers to, and which even many christians are deprived of. These are the *oracles,* and *statutes,* and *judgments* of God,

Micah 6. 8. "which shew us what is good; and what the Lord our God requires of us;" which set before us the way of life, and the way of death; and "teach us what we must do to be saved."

[1 Thess. 2. 13.] "Which, being in truth the Word of God, does effectually work in them that believe." Having this advantage above all other writings, that such as read or hear them with an

[John 7. 17.] honest mind, and sincerely desire to do the will of God, *such shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*

In short, this is that book, of which the Spirit in the book of Revelations [ch. i. 3.] affirms, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this book, and keep those things which are written therein."

[1 Thess. 4. 1.] Having thus received of the Lord Jesus, "how we ought to walk and to please God," let us now see how we follow this pattern; what use we make of this mighty blessing.

And verily, there is such a plain opposition betwixt the rules of the Gospel and the lives of many christians, that one cannot but fear that they make but very little use of God's Word, either for increasing their faith or governing their lives. And yet they say, they *believe* the Gospel, and that they *hope* to be saved.

This is a strange delusion indeed! Can a man say with any truth, that he *believes* the Gospel, which gives a plain and positive account of the very different condition of good and bad men after death; which gives rules for christians to walk by, upon the *observance* or *neglect* of which they are to be *happy* or *miserable* for ever: will a man say that he *believes these things,* and yet live as unconcernedly as if nothing were to be feared, nothing to be desired?

Now, to hinder this delusion from taking place, God has

appointed an order of men, whom He has been pleased to call *His ministers, His ambassadors;* whom *He* has made *overseers* of His flock, and appointed them to *bless the people in His name;* to *exhort* and to *rebuke* gainsayers; and if they continue obstinate, to *reject* them.

These are their *powers;* and their *duty* is, in Christ's stead, to exhort christians, *that they receive not the grace of God in vain,* but that they walk worthy of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light, and to give them warning of the great hazard of *holding the truth in unrighteousness:* and to guard them against contempt, while they faithfully do their duty, Jesus Christ has declared, "that he that despiseth them, despiseth God that sent them." And has made it the mark of an heathen for any man to set light by their censures. Luke 10. 16. Matt. 18. 17.

And now, would not one expect that such persons should, as the Apostle commands, be *highly esteemed by christians for their works' sake,* as well as for their Master's sake? [1 Thess. 5. 13.]

I wish it might be said, with any truth, that the generality of christians are truly sensible of the great blessing of a *regular standing ministry.* But the truth is, the wicked pains which too many take to defeat this gracious design of God for their good, and the too little regard for their administrations and godly admonitions, which others discover, should in all reason make christians ashamed of their iniquities, and afraid of the consequence, namely, *the removing their candlestick,* that is, unchurching them.

The next merciful provision which God has made to preserve true religion amongst men is, *that of the Sabbath.* One day in seven is expressly commanded by God Himself *to be kept holy;* that is, to be employed in hearing God's Word, in begging His pardon and blessing, in giving Him thanks for His mercies, and in learning how to please Him *here,* that we may be happy *hereafter.*

Let us now see how the generality of christians observe this command of God—*Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.* Why, truly, just as they do the rest of God's favours. Some make it a day of *idleness;* others of *sinful pleasures;* many go to church merely for *form's sake,* and many to avoid the imputation of having *no religion;* some [Exod. 20. 8.]

SERM. IX.

will go only when they are in *humour*, when the *preacher* pleases them, when they have *nothing else* to do; and of those that *do go constantly*, how few seem to be truly affected with the blessed opportunity of approaching God! How few go with a sincere desire to be informed of their duty! How few behave themselves with the humility and reverence of people that know they are in the house of God; that acknowledge themselves to be miserable sinners, and know that they are for ever undone, if God does not pardon them! How few seem to be truly thankful for the mercies they have received, or truly sensible of the blessings they stand in need of!

And is it not for want of *thus* approaching God, with dispositions becoming *His* majesty, and *our* miserable condition, that too many return from God's house without a blessing; and very many, it is to be feared, without so much as asking a blessing?

Let us consider the other *means of grace*. We say, *the sacraments are necessary to salvation*. Do the generality of christians seem to believe them, in good earnest, to be so? Why truly, as to the first, christians are generally very careful to have their children baptized; and very ready to promise for them, that those conditions which God requires of persons to be baptized, shall be observed when they come to age; and then they suppose, that they have done *their* duty, though they neither think of this promise themselves, nor take any great care that their children shall either know or perform it. Through which wretched carelessness of too many parents, it comes to pass, that they, who by baptism have been made the *children of God, and heirs of heaven*, instead of continuing such, have become the children of the devil, and heirs of damnation.

We all know that this is not the pattern set us in sacred Scripture. I know, saith God of Abraham, that he will teach his children *to keep the way of the Lord*. And they that neglect to do so, will have reason to repent, when they find not *that comfort* in their children which they hoped for; and when their children will wish that they had never been born.

[Gen. 18. 19.]

To prevent this, and to provide a remedy against the carelessness of too many parents, the Church has ordered, that as soon as children come to years of discretion, they shall be

brought to be CONFIRMED; that is, the Church will then be satisfied,—and *that from their own mouths,*—whether they know what a solemn vow, promise, and profession, was made in their name at their baptism; and whether they will ratify and confirm the same in their own persons? Which if they do sincerely, they become complete members of the Church of Christ, and have a right to all the blessings of being such; which are, the forgiveness of all their past sins; the manifold graces of God's Holy Spirit; and an assurance of everlasting life and happiness, if they shall be careful to keep the vows they now take upon them.

And now, would not one expect to see all parents very thankful for such a blessed opportunity of having their children set out as they should do, so as living or dying to be a comfort to them? But, instead of this, instead of being solicitous to have their children duly prepared for this ordinance, too many parents are very little concerned whether their children are *instructed* or not; whether they are confirmed; nay, whether they are likely to be saved or damned. And those very parents, who would be in the greatest affliction to see their children made slaves for life, can yet be content to see them in danger of becoming slaves to hell to all eternity; which they are sure to be, if they are not instructed how to live so as to please God.

This is an occasion of grief to all serious christians: and all christians should be ashamed of such stupid carelessness.

The great end of Confirmation is, to *prepare young christians for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.* That, as often as that sacrament shall be administered, they may have an opportunity of making their peace with God; of obtaining His pardon for any sins they have fallen into; of renewing their vows, and obtaining such further degrees of grace as are necessary for their present condition.

Here, if ever, one would expect to find all who profess christianity, very *serious,* and very *sincere;* very *constant,* and very *devout,* at this sacrament.

The command is plain and positive: *Do this in remembrance of Me;* of ME, your Redeemer; of ME, Who am going to lay down My life for you. The duty is easy to be *understood* by [Luke 22. 19.]

SERM. IX.

the meanest capacity; and easy to be *performed* by all that are willing to lead a godly life.

All christians are bound, at the peril of their souls, to observe this ordinance of Christ. *The blessings* which attend the worthy receiving this sacrament are invaluable: no less than the pardon of all our past sins; the continuance of God's Holy Spirit; the increase of His graces here, and eternal happiness hereafter. And lastly, *the neglect* or *abuse* of this ordinance will be punished with judgments in this world, and in the world to come with misery unspeakable.

Notwithstanding all this, this ordinance is very much neglected, and much profaned by too many; by too many, who would tremble to think of renouncing the Christian Religion; who yet do in effect renounce the *Communion of Saints*, by turning their backs upon this ordinance. Not now to mention the strange indifference which too many discover, who come to the Lord's Supper; not considering that it is as much the *food of their souls*, and as necessary for their spiritual growth, as *their daily bread* is for the support of their bodies.

And what do you think the consequence of this indifference will be? Why, assure yourselves, the very same with that mentioned by the Evangelist; when the King came to see the guests, *and saw there a man that had not on him a wedding garment;* that is, one who professed to be a disciple of Christ, but yet behaved himself very unworthy of such a master; the King, therefore, ordered him first to be turned out of his house as an hypocrite, and then to be cast into *outer darkness*, where there is nothing but *weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matt. 22. 12.

And now, good christians, I have shewed you YOUR PATTERN, I have set before you the *design* of christianity, and the *means* appointed by God Himself for bringing *that design about.* That He has given us His *holy Word*, by which we come to the knowledge of Him and His glorious perfections; that He is infinitely *good*, and therefore to be *loved* above all things; that He is infinitely *just*, and therefore at our peril not to be *offended;* that He is infinite *in power*, and therefore to be feared. By that Word also we come to know our own condition; that we are sadly fallen from that state in which we were created; that we are become the objects of

God's *anger*, and of His *compassion*; that He is pleased to offer us *pardon* upon the most reasonable terms; and has given us all possible assurance, that if we make *this Word* the rule of our faith and manners, we shall be the care of His holy Angels while we live, and be very happy when we die. That to bring this about, He calls us by His ministers to repentance. By them (that is, by *baptism* administered by them) we are admitted into His household, which is the Church, by which we become His children, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. That if we are so unhappy as to offend Him after this, He will notwithstanding be reconciled to us upon our pleading His Son's atonement, represented in the sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*.

By all this, you see what God has done for us, and what more He will do for us, if it is not our own fault.

You have seen likewise, how the generality of christians are affected with this love of God, and His tender concern for them. That it is too often with difficulty that they will be brought to consider these things with any seriousness. That they act as if they thought they did not stand in need of these *means of grace*; either altogether *neglecting* them, or using them with *indifference*.

To many, the *Lord's day* is a burden; *prayer* is discharged as if it were a *task*, and not a *privilege*. The sacraments are used as common things; and as if no special blessings were annexed to them.

In short, you have been shewn, that too, too many content themselves with an *outward performance* of a few religious duties, without ever considering, that unless the *heart be changed*, all other shews of religion will never qualify a man for heaven and happiness.

And yet *heaven* and *happiness*, as *faint* as our belief of them is, and as *unconcerned* as the generality of christians are about them, are what we all *hope* for: I was going to say, *what we all make ourselves sure of*. Now, this is a matter in which, *if we deceive ourselves*, we are for ever undone.

To prevent this, as I have in part shewed you OUR PATTERN, and how far too many christians *come short* of it; and therefore (*if they be not ashamed*, and mend) will come short of heaven; so I would, before I conclude, put you in mind of a

SERM. IX.

few *truths*, very proper to make us all more serious and concerned *to be*, what we all profess to be, *christians indeed*.

[Rom. 9. 6.]

The Apostle observed to the Jews, *that they were not all Israel, that were of Israel. The carnal Jew* expected God's favour, because he was of Abraham's seed, and of Abraham's religion. *The carnal christian* has the same false hopes; he blesses God he is a christian, and hopes for salvation without *loving God*, or *parting* with his sins.

Faith and obedience, therefore, must never be separated. A fruitless faith is of no more value than a fruitless tree; you all know the fate of it; "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

[Luke 13. 7.]

To *hope* much, and *do* little, is too much the way of the world; but be assured of it (good christians), wherever there is a *true faith*, and a *well-grounded hope*, there will always be a proportionable concern to do what God has commanded. And wherever there is *such a concern*, and a *real desire* to do the will of God, there will always be a proportionable degree of *knowledge*, *grace*, and *assistance*, given by God; so that no christian must ever say, that he cannot *do* the things which he is commanded.

And for our comfort we may remember, that *christian perfection* does not consist in *having no failings*, but in *striving against them always*, and not suffering them to get the dominion over us.

And, because *humility* is a grace most acceptable to God, let this consideration be ever present with us, that if we really *did do* the things we are commanded, and as we *should do* them; we must, as our Lord bids us, say, *We are unprofitable servants*, we have but done that which is our duty; and if God shall think fit to give us any reward, it is of mere grace that He does so. So that when we *serve* God, let us remember that we *serve ourselves* much more.

[Luke 17. 10.]

And it is fit we should know, that although God has not *tied Himself to ordinances*, yet He has bound us to the use of them; and that christian will be sadly deceived, who shall expect *grace*, or *pardon*, or *assistance*, or *heaven*, without a sincere observance of *the means of grace*.

But then, let us beware that we do not rest in a *form of religion*, without feeling *the power* of religion: for, most cer-

tainly, *imperfect conversions, a mere formal religion, a zeal for lesser duties, a forsaking of scandalous sins and indulging of others,* will in the end be found as hazardous as the most profligate life. A profligate sinner may be startled by God's judgment; but a sinner who thinks himself safe, what *can* convince him? And indeed (as one very truly observes) those are not the greatest enemies to religion that are *most irreligious: a formal christian* may do more hurt than an *atheist.*

To conclude this discourse. The great end of religion is, *to restore us to the favour of God,* from which we are sadly fallen. If our religion does *not* do this; if it does not make us more humble, more fearful of offending God, more concerned to do what we know will please Him, more *holy, just,* and *charitable,* than we are by nature; *we had as good to have no religion.*

THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF. *This* is our *Law* and our *Pattern;* this is what every christian is to aim at; and God will proportion every christian's reward, according as he shall sincerely strive to come up to this rule. [Luke 10. 27.]

That we may all strive to do so, let us seriously consider the great importance of those words of Christ, MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN; that is, many profess christianity, but, of those many, few will be saved, because they do not live up to the rules of the Gospel. *This,* if any thing, *will make us serious.* [Matt. 22. 14.]

And may God, Who has blessed us with a knowledge of our duty, and the happiness we are capable of, and with sufficient means of attaining it; may He *put His fear into our hearts,* and suffer us not to content ourselves with *bare shadows* of religion, without endeavouring after *that holiness without which no man must see the Lord.*

Grant this, O God, for Jesus Christ's sake.

SERMON X.

THE SHAME AND DANGER OF BEING CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CHRISTIANITY.

EZEKIEL xliii. 10.

See Ezek. 20.4; 22.2; Matt. 7.14; John 13.15; Phil. 1. 27; 1 Thess. 2. 12; 1 John 1. 6, &c.; Jer. 7. 9.

Thou Son of Man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern.

I MADE choice of these words, in order to oblige christians to reflect upon their own conduct, and the danger *they* are in who lead a life contrary to what they believe and profess.

I was sure it was a most proper method, because the Spirit of God directed the Prophet to do the same; *to shew the house of Israel their pattern, that they might measure it,* that is, take particular notice of it, *and be ashamed,* when they should see with their own eyes how sadly they came short of it.

The way I took in my former discourse on these words, to convince christians of *the shame and danger of being christians without christianity,* and that as far as they come short of their pattern, so far they will most certainly come short of that happiness which God has promised His faithful servants, was this: I first shewed that the *great design of the Gospel* was, to make men holy, that they might be *capable* of being happy. Then I explained the means which God has appointed to bring that design about: such are, His Word and Sacraments, His Ministers, and His Sabbaths. After this, I shewed, how little the generality of christians are affected with this gracious design of God for their good; how little they esteem it; and how indifferently they comply with the means ordained by God for bringing that design about. This I did, to awaken christians into a sense of the danger

they are in, if they should continue to despise so great means of salvation.

The next thing I proposed was, to set before you, in one short view, your pattern, *with respect to the things required on our part to fit us for heaven and happiness.* And this is what I purpose, by God's blessing, to do at this time.

Now, the things required on our part are, FAITH and REPENTANCE. To believe in God, and to keep His commandments, is what every christian promises when he is baptized.

We will first consider, *what it is which we profess to believe.* We profess to believe of God, that He is infinite in *power;* that we depend on Him for life and breath and all things; that He *knows* and *sees* every thing that is done; that He is perfectly *holy,* and cannot but be displeased with every thing that is wicked or unjust; that He is infinitely *just,* in punishing such as abuse His goodness; for His goodness is such, that He cannot command any thing which is not absolutely necessary for the happiness of His creatures: and lastly, that He is most *faithful* and *true,* and will make good all His promises.

Now, the duties which should follow from the knowledge and belief of these things, are these: That we should *fear* this great God; that we should fear to offend Him above all things; that we should *love* Him with all our heart, forasmuch as all the blessings we enjoy, or hope for, are the effect of His goodness; that we should keep His commandments, it being our interest as well as duty to do so; that we should be thankful for His favours, never murmur at what He orders for us, depend upon His word and promises, and honour and reverence every thing that belongs to Him.

If our faith in God has not these effects, it is surely not such as it should be. For *to believe* is to be persuaded of the truth of the thing we believe.

But can it be said with any truth, that christians do generally live as if they were really persuaded of the truth of those things which yet they profess to believe? For if men are not at all afraid of offending God, and of breaking His laws, it cannot be said, that they are convinced that God will punish sinners, and that He sees all their ways.

Will christians, who live at all adventures without fear and

SERM. X.

without concern, say, that they verily believe, and are persuaded, that joys unspeakable will be the portion of good men, and that unutterable miseries will be the lot of the wicked?

Will a man say, that he loves God with all his soul, whose conscience tells him, that he loves many things better; that he seldom thinks of God, and that he takes little care to please Him?

Shall we pretend to say, *that we put our whole trust in God*, when we seldom ask for His guidance and blessing; when we value not His promises, nor are careful to perform the conditions on which all His promises are made?

How do we express our dependance upon God, when we are not careful to pray to Him for what we want, and forget to give Him thanks for the mercies we every day receive from Him?

[Matt. 10. 28.]

With what assurance will a man say, *that he fears Him Who can destroy both body and soul in hell*, who will act against his conscience for the fear of man, or to avoid any worldly inconvenience?

Lastly; will any man say, that he honours God, who upon every occasion takes His name in vain; who sets no value upon His word or ordinances; who despises His ministers and His sabbaths?

These things are so inconsistent with what we profess to believe of God, that christians only want to reflect a very little, and to compare their doings with their pattern, to fill them with shame and confusion.

And so it would, in the next place, if they would but consider what they profess to believe concerning Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation *by Him* made known to us.

We acknowledge Him to be the Son of God; that God sent Him to make His will known to us; that He taught us, both by His word and example, how to live and to please God. He knew that we could never be happy till we were restored to the favour of God; which we never could be, till we should be restored to His image. In order to this, He proposes to us the forgiveness of all our sins, upon our sincere repentance; the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to renew what is amiss in us; and eternal happiness after death.

To convince us of the *evil of sin,* and to make us abhor and flee from it, He assures us, that sinners will have their portion with devils, if they do not make their peace with God by a timely repentance.

To prevail with God to accept of their repentance, He laid down His life for us (for no less a sacrifice would be accepted); and that we might not be for ever miserable.

To convince us more effectually, by His own example, of what moment these things are to us, and of what little value this world is in comparison of that which is to come, He, the Lord of all things, made choice of a life of *poverty, humility, afflictions, resignation,* and *self-denial;* renouncing all those pleasures and advantages, which the world values and is fond of.

And lastly; that He might make His precepts and example effectual to our salvation, He receives us into His family, instructs us by His ministers, guides us by His Spirit, protects us by His Angels, and is our Mediator with God for all the blessings we want and pray for.

And now let us consider what are the consequences of this tender concern of our Saviour for us? What are the effects of our belief of these things? Shall we say, that the generality of christians do make the life of Christ their pattern; and are verily persuaded, that all His doctrines are most true; that His precepts are most necessary to fit us for heaven; His promises of grace and assistance upon our sincere prayers, and of pardon upon our repentance, to be entirely depended upon; and lastly, His account of a judgment to come, of the joys of heaven, and of the torments of hell, most certain?

Would to God we could say, with truth, that christians are generally convinced of these things, and that they live accordingly. But how can we say so, when we see too, too many very indifferent whether these things are true or not; and most of all, who acknowledge them *to be true,* and yet will not be persuaded to live as they *know* and *believe* they ought to do?

To instance in some particulars: We believe that Jesus Christ "has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel;" that is, He has made known to us the certainty of a future and an eternal state after death. Now this

2 Tim. 1. 10.

SERM. X.

should, in all reason, oblige christians to consider things *as they have respect to eternity*. But is this the fruit of our faith? On the contrary, we live as if this were to be our everlasting home; we desire to set up our rest here; and we seldom think of, seldomer provide for, a life to come.

Are christians persuaded, that as soon as they die, they shall go to a place either of happiness or misery, according as they have lived in this world? If they *do* believe this, it is certain they do not often think of it. And yet Jesus Christ assures us, it will be so; and that a christian ought to part with any thing as *dear to him as a right hand or a right eye*, rather than provoke God to send him to hell.

[Matt. 5. 29, 30.]

Then, for the example He has set us, we know with what a small share of the world He was satisfied, though all nature was at His command. We hear Him every where exhorting, and even requiring, His followers to take up the cross, to deny themselves, to mortify their corrupt affections, as ever they hope to be happy hereafter. If there are any of His followers, who never think they have enough of this world; who aim at nothing so much as to be easy, to meet with no crosses, to have whatever their hearts desire; who will not deny themselves any satisfaction; it will not sure be said, that such christians take Jesus Christ for their pattern, or that He will ever own them for His followers.

It is upon the account of the great things our Saviour has done for us, that the Apostle says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha," that is, accursed when the Lord comes to judgment. How do christians shew that they love Him? I will tell you how they should satisfy themselves in this; that they do love Him sincerely. If they love His humility, His patience, His self-denial, and strive to imitate them; if they hate that sin, which for our sake cost Him His life; lastly, if they desire to know what will please Him, and, when they know the things which He has commanded, do endeavour to do them; then they have that very testimony of their love, which Jesus Christ requires; all others being nothing but delusion.

[1 Cor. 16. 22.]

To conclude this particular. Christians profess to *live by faith*. They should know, in the first place, that *faith* is the

gift of God, and to be prayed for. If they neglect to do this, and to put themselves into a capacity of receiving the grace of God, they must not wonder if God denies them His grace.

A christian may know certainly whether he lives by faith or not. If he lives as in the presence of God, fearful of offending Him, concerned to please Him; when the promises and threats of the Gospel affect us; when the fear of hell hinders us from following forbidden pleasures; when the hopes of heaven keep us from doating upon the appearances of happiness we meet with here; when the *belief of a judgment to come* makes us watchful over our thoughts, designs, words, and actions: in one word, when we govern ourselves by the rules of the Gospel, it is then we *live by faith,* and shall most certainly obtain the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

We shall now consider christians in the ordinary duties of life, and see how they follow their *rule,* their *pattern,* with respect to the commands of God; that if we find a too general departure from the rules set us to walk by, we may consider what it will end in.

Now christians are represented in Sacred Scripture, as *a people called from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;* who having renounced the *world,* the *flesh,* and the *devil,* are no longer subject to them, but are *holy* in their lives, *just* in their dealings, and *charitable* to one another; who keep a careful watch over themselves, and against their spiritual enemies; praying continually for grace to withstand them; having their eye always upon the prize of their high calling, the joy set before them; dreading, at the same time, the dismal consequences of miscarrying. [Acts 26. 18.]

It is impossible to consider this account of christianity with any sort of seriousness, without making very melancholy reflections, with respect both to ourselves and others.

When one sees many christians as ignorant of God and of their duty as the very heathens, who are still in darkness and under the power of Satan: when one sees christians as careless, as indifferent, and as secure, as if there were nothing to be feared, nothing to be hoped for: when one sees christians praying for the pardon of their sins, for grace to amend

SERM. X.

their lives, for deliverance from eternal misery, and for the joys of heaven, with the indifference of people that are not concerned to be heard: when one sees them as fond of the world, as if they had vowed never to forsake it; as if God designed, as if God could give them no better inheritance: when one considers these things, one cannot but say, that such christians forget their pattern, and that they are in the way to ruin.

To be a little more particular; and to begin with the duties we owe to our neighbour: would a stranger to our religion imagine, that christians had any such a command as this; [Luke 10. 27.] *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;* when he should see it every day violated in a thousand instances? And would he not be astonished, when he should be assured, that this is one of those two commands, upon the keeping of which their eternal salvation does depend? When he should see christians, who profess to believe this, so far from being *just* (for instance), that they must often be *compelled* to give every man what is his due, and must be hindered, by a superior power, from doing hurt to their neighbour; who make no conscience of doing wrong, of using deceit and fraud, of taking advantage of the ignorance and necessities of others, of injuring their neighbours by false witness, by spreading reports, and passing judgments, which are contrary to truth and charity. And lastly, who, when they have done wrong, or given offence, refuse to make restitution, though they know for certain their repentance will never be accepted without such satisfaction and amends. Christians know very well that all these things are contrary to that love which they owe to their neighbour; that it is doing to others what they would not have done to themselves; and that it is at the peril of their souls, when they do them.

If christians have too often so little regard to *justice,* shall we suppose that they will have a greater regard to that *charity,* which by the laws of the Gospel is due to their neighbour; that they will *forgive,* and *give,* and *love,* as becomes the disciples of Jesus Christ? And yet no less than the salvation of our souls depends upon this. [James 2. 13.] "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy," saith the Apostle. And our Lord hath expressly declared, that at the

day of judgment, such as have had no compassion for their poor brethren shall have no favour from God.

If we descend to particular duties, we shall find them as much neglected, as if God had given no commands concerning them.

We shall find, for instance, too many children regardless of the authority of their parents, disposing of themselves as if they were their own masters, refusing to be corrected, hating to be advised; and too many parents utterly unconcerned for the good education of their children in the fear of God.

We shall find subjects obedient, not out of conscience, but for fear of punishment; defrauding the public, speaking evil of dignities; as well as too many in authority, who discover a very little zeal for the glory of God (Whose ministers they are), when they punish the sins against men with much greater severity than those against God.

We shall find pastors and their instructions despised, and the authority of Jesus Christ rejected in the persons of His ministers; and these also forgetting the end of their calling, to watch over the flock, to instruct, to reprove, and to pray for them.

We shall find husbands and wives as careless of their marriage vows, as if God, Who was called to witness when they made them, was not able to punish them for their perjury.

Lastly, we shall find christian servants unfaithful to their masters; and these again forgetting that they have a master in heaven.

Now, they that are thus regardless of their duty, and feel *no uneasiness, no stings of conscience;* they must be very ignorant, or given up to A REPROBATE MIND.

Let us, in the last place, consider the duties we owe to *ourselves,* and see whether we discharge these any better than those we owe to our neighbour. Now, the first and great duty which we owe to ourselves is, *to take care of our souls.* Christians would not hear a man with patience, who should say, that people need not mind their salvation; and yet, if we must speak the truth, we *must* say, that the generality of christians do not take any care of their souls; that is, they do not mind those rules which are absolutely necessary to fit them for heaven and happiness.

SERM. X.

For, let me ask again, are the generality of christians to be known from infidels by their *self-denial, patience, humility, purity,* and *charity?* And yet, without these graces and virtues, no man *can* be happy. "If any man will come after Me (saith our Saviour), let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Is this no longer a christian duty?

[Matt. 16. 24.]

The intent of our blessed Lord in this command is, to wean our affections from this world, and to subdue them, that God may take possession of our souls, and by His Holy Spirit fit them for eternal happiness. And, therefore, all those christians, which are too plainly the greatest number, who give way to their inclinations, who follow not what is most pleasing to God, but to corrupt nature, are, without any doubt, in the way of perdition.

Where is that *resignation to the will of God,* which reason as well as religion has made our duty? We pray, indeed, THAT GOD'S WILL MAY BE DONE; but we are angry when it is done, and in effect charge Him with injustice, when He would punish us in this life, that He may not be obliged to do it in the next; or when He would prevent or cure a disorder, which if not done would infallibly ruin us.

[Matt. 5. 8.] The promise of SEEING GOD is made to THE PURE AND CLEAN OF HEART, and to these only. What then must become of that infinite number of people, whose hearts are full of all impurity; who entertain such thoughts as defile the soul, and make it utterly unfit for the Spirit of God to be there? Must we not say, that all such are excluded from the promise of seeing God? And, if an impure heart will shut us out of heaven, impure actions will make us fit for no place but hell.

We may shut our eyes and our ears against such affrighting truths; but as sure as God has made His will known to us, this will be the issue of such a life: "No unclean person shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God; but shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

[Eph. 5. 5; Rev. 21. 8.]

Lastly; what shall we say of those many christians, who lead an idle and a useless life; or of those who are indeed industrious, but it is only to be more rich, that they may be

more miserable? Do such people consider, that they are christians; that they have an interest to secure, on which their ALL depends; and that it is in this life their lot is determined either for heaven or for hell.

You will say, perhaps, that christians know all this; but then it must be acknowledged, that they that *do* know these things, and yet live as if they did not believe them, that their condemnation and judgment will be most severe as well as just.

To prevent this, I have set before *you* and *myself, our pattern;* I have shewed you how very little the generality of christians do mind it: and this I have done, not to expose the weakness and corruption of human nature, but to awaken us all into a serious sense of the bad condition of those who live without God in the world: and that every one of us, seeing how sadly we come short of our pattern, may be ashamed, and afraid too, lest our repentance and amendment should come too late. And lastly, that such christians as have made the life and the doctrine of Christ their pattern, may by this representation have the comfort of seeing that they are not of the number of those unhappy people, who content themselves with the bare name of christians, with mere shadows of religion and piety, without endeavouring after that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

And now, you see plainly, that to be a christian, and a *true* christian, are two very different things.

A TRUE CHRISTIAN sets his pattern before his eyes; and because his salvation depends on it, he resolves to make it the rule of his life. He studies therefore the *truths* and the *duties* of the Gospel; prefers the light he meets with there to all others: he resolves, that what the Gospel declares, *that* he will believe, let what will be said against it; that what it recommends, he will follow *that,* and avoid what it forbids. If, upon examining his conscience, he finds that he does any thing contrary to what the Gospel prescribes, he is ashamed and sorry for it; begs God's pardon, and His grace to observe it better for the time to come; watches over his inclinations, avoiding every temptation that may lead him to sin; never consulting the world, its *authority,* its *customs,* or its

SERM. X.

frowns, for what he ought to do, or what to avoid. And by doing this he secures the favour of God, His grace here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

On the other hand, those christians who live, *as too many do,* in a general forgetfulness of God; taking no care of their souls; contenting themselves with some outward formalities, and bare shadows of religion, without feeling its power; who make the world their pattern, notwithstanding the caution Jesus Christ has given us not to follow its ways and maxims; such people, under the name of christians, are very heathens, will be rejected of God, and are reserved for a punishment dreadful to be named.

Christians must not, to excuse themselves, say, that they cannot come up to their pattern, to be what the Gospel requires them to be. It is no less than blasphemy to say so. For God's grace is sufficient; His grace may be had for asking; and He requires no more of us than what (upon our sincere prayers and endeavours) He will enable us to perform.

To conclude: God has given us a *Law,* by which He will judge us; by this law we are to judge what our condition is like to be hereafter, whether happy or miserable. That we may make this judgment more impartially, let us consider what our thoughts will be when we come to die. Whether, for instance, we shall not be in the utmost confusion, when, our life and pattern being set before us, it shall appear that we have lived in a plain contempt, or neglect at least, of what we professed to believe, what we knew to be our duty, and what we were often put in mind would be the consequence of neglecting it? Or, whether we shall then have the comfort of having compared our life with our pattern, seen our errors, made our peace with God by a timely repentance, and lived to bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life?

One of these two will be the case of myself, and of every one here present; how soon, we know not; but it highly concerns us to be prepared for it, and that forthwith, *lest the night come, when no man can work.* [John 9. 4]

To this end let us retire, and beg of God, Who has given us our pattern, and Who alone can enable us to follow it, to

put His fear into our hearts, to give us the grace of repentance, to sanctify us both in body and soul, "that we may be meet to be partakers of an inheritance with the saints in light;" which God grant we may all be, for Jesus Christ's sake. [Col. i. 12.]

SERMON XI.

SEPTUAGESIMA. SEXAGESIMA. QUINQUAGESIMA. LENT.

FEAR AND CARE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN OUR WAY TO HEAVEN.

Fill my soul, O Lord, with a salutary dread of the unfaithfulness of my own heart; and, while I am labouring for the salvation of others, give me grace to fear for myself. Amen.

1 PETER i. 17.

Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

See Ps. 2. 11; 39. 1; Luke 12. 37; 17. 28; 2 Cor. 5. 11; 7. 1; Eph. 5. 15; 1 Thess. 5. 6; 2 Pet. 1. 10.

THESE words are a serious admonition to all christians. I hope, therefore, you will hear them explained with great attention. The plain meaning of them is this: forasmuch as your eternal happiness or misery will depend upon your behaviour in this life, it concerns you, as much as your souls are worth, to live with great CARE AND FEAR, lest, when you die, you should be miserable for ever.

Care and concern (for that is the meaning of *fear* in this place) are necessary even in our worldly affairs, if we would not let them go to ruin. But christians must be strangely careless, fearless, and unthoughtful, who profess to believe a judgment to come, and yet are unconcerned what sentence their works shall deserve, what sentence God in justice *must* pass upon them.

And yet all christians, who are not careful of their lives, who are not fearful of offending God, are in this desperate condition. They are going headlong to certain ruin,—to a ruin that never can be remedied; and yet are fearless and unconcerned.

The *Duty* therefore, good christians, which I would explain to you at this time, and which I would charge upon you and upon myself, as ever we hope for heaven and happiness, is this; *to preserve ourselves, as much as possibly we can, and at all times, in a serious temper.* This being what the Apostle means, when he exhorts christians "to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear;" when he bids us in another place, 1 Pet. 5. 8. "be sober, be vigilant." The same which St. Paul advises christians, "to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with a concern answerable to the great work they have to do, and to the loss they are like to suffer, if it be not done. This also is what the same Apostle intimates in these words: "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall:" that is, let no man be too secure of himself, lest he fall when he least thinks of it. This is what the Wise Man means by saying, "happy is the man that feareth always;" and that "he is truly a wise man, who feareth and departeth from evil." This is also what the Psalmist speaks in other words, "stand in awe and sin not;" intimating, that our great security lies in an AWFUL FEAR of offending God. And lastly, this is the meaning of the warning so often repeated by our blessed Lord; to be always upon our *guard,* to *watch,* to be *sober,* to *fear Him* Who can destroy both body and soul.

Phil. 2. 12. 1 Cor. 10. 12. Prov. 28. 14. Prov. 14. 16. Ps. 4. 4.

Thus, you see, the Holy Spirit, in these and in many more places of Sacred Scripture, lays down this for a certain truth, and a truth of the greatest moment, being so often repeated, that *fear, and a serious care and concern, are absolutely necessary in our way to heaven.* And that they who have no concern upon their spirits, and lay little to heart, are in the sure way to ruin.

But that you may not misunderstand these Scriptures, or imagine that the *fear* and *concern* here recommended consist in a *sourness of temper,* or *a dejected spirit;* or that this fear must necessarily be attended with MELANCHOLY, *sadness of mind,* and a *life of sorrow*; I must tell you, that it is so far from this, that there is nothing more cheerful, no cure for melancholy so certain, as a religious fear and concern to please God.

For this fear arises from an awful regard for the commands

SERM. XI.

of a God, infinitely *Holy, Just,* and *Powerful;* Who is yet so good as to pardon those that return to Him in the sincerity of their heart, and will be careful and desirous to please Him.

This fear consists in a concern for having offended so gracious a Father, with a serious resolution of doing so no more. It is a fear of falling into the common vices of the world, attended with a sober purpose of keeping out of the way of temptations. It consists in a just sense of our own weakness and infirmities, with a full confidence in God's gracious assistance, when we ask it in sincerity.

In short; the fear here spoken of, and in which we ought to pass our whole lives, is a serious concern for our eternal welfare; a *care* lest Satan get an advantage over us; a dread of provoking God, and of forfeiting that grace on which our salvation depends.

And *this fear* is formed in our hearts, by considering seriously the greatness and majesty of God, the holiness of His laws, the great happiness we are capable of, and the extreme misery we are liable to if we should miscarry. By considering the *enemies* we have to deal with, the *temptations* we are sure to meet with, the *corruption* and *inconstancy* of our own nature, and the many sad instances before our eyes, of men ruining themselves to all intents and purposes, for want of *thought,* and *fear,* and *care,* for what must become of them when they die.

A man can hardly think of these things with seriousness, but he must have *some* fear, *some* concern for himself.

Now, if this concern disposeth him to hear and receive the truth; if it restrains him from evil, and makes him desirous to please God; why then a man answers the purpose of God, in putting His fear into his heart; and this fear will be of use to him in every circumstance of life, and become a means both of *obtaining* and *securing* the favour of God.

Christians therefore have great reason, as ever they hope for the favour of God, to beware how they oppose, or strive to stifle or divert, *a serious temper of mind,* and a *salutary fear for themselves.* For, in the first place, it is THAT VERY FRAME OF SPIRIT *which God makes use of in order to bring us into the way of salvation.*

By this, He represents to our mind things of the greatest concern to us; and, as it were, forces us to consider them. He sets before us, on one hand, *eternal happiness*, as possible to be attained by due care, and yet as possible to be lost by negligence and a sinful security. On the other hand, having filled our hearts with godly fear, He represents eternal misery as the certain portion of wicked men, of careless and unthoughtful people.

It is to minds full of this godly fear, that He shews men to themselves, and makes them see their sad and sinful state, their weakness and inconstancy; that they may see a necessity of fleeing to God for help, or the danger of continuing in a condition which must end in ruin.

"They that be whole (saith our Saviour) need not a physician, but they that are sick:" that is, such as consider their own ailments, and are afraid for themselves, will look out for help, while such as are under no concern sit still, and are in danger of being lost. [Matt. 9. 12.]

People are apt to think, that because they know their duty or their danger, they can easily perform the one and avoid the other, whenever they please; but it generally happens, that both duty and danger are neglected until God awakens the soul into a sense of her misery. And God makes use of this passion of fear, to make all his other gifts and graces effectual for our salvation.

Thus the Apostle observes, "that Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house;" intimating, that his faith, great as it was, stood in need of *fear* to quicken it, to make him do what God had commanded him, to save himself from perishing with the rest of the world. Heb. 11. 7.

Let us add to this, that this religious fear is what makes us fit objects of God's grace and compassion. So saith the Spirit expressly, "To this man will I look, even to him that trembleth at My Word." And our Lord, by inviting such as are "weary and heavy laden;" such, whose misery has made them concerned and serious, "to come unto Him;" intimates thus much, that "these shall find rest unto their souls," because *these* only are prepared to receive it. Isa. 66. 2. [Matt. 11. 28, 29.]

Lastly; it is this salutary fear, which makes the duties of christianity less frightful and burdensome. To break off

SERM. XI.

evil habits; to deny one's-self many things which we are but too fond of; to mortify the flesh, and our sinful affections; to take up the cross; these are duties which would most certainly discourage a christian, if God, by putting His fear into our hearts, did not convince us of the necessity of doing any thing to escape the wrath to come. For then, let repentance and the difficulties of a new life be never so irksome, a man, who considers any thing, will choose them, rather than continue under the displeasure of an angry God, Who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

And this consideration (if we resist not the Spirit of God) is often forced upon us, to let us see what a careless and fearless life is like to end in.

And here, one cannot but wonder at those, who, forgetting this only sure argument of conviction, endeavour to persuade men to forsake their evil ways, upon the account of the unreasonableness of them, and the worldly inconveniences that attend them.

Alas! our corrupt hearts will not be effectually changed by all that ever can be said upon the worldly inconveniences that will attend our continuing in sin; and few men but will get over all such reasons when tempted to sin.

But who is so hardy as to slight eternal misery, and hell fire, when he shall be convinced that these will be the certain reward of an evil life?

And indeed, we have of ourselves so little inclination to lay things to heart, that if God had not set before us the terrors of the world to come, and did not fill our hearts with fears of future evils, not one man in ten thousand would make the least step towards being reconciled to God.

But God has mercifully provided a remedy for this weakness and corruption of our nature, by making known to us the certain miserable portion of wicked men in the life which is to come. And this God has done, in order to awaken us; to make us serious; to make the pleasures of this world less palatable and bewitching; to break the force of temptations; and to convince us that the difficulties of a religious life are to be chosen before everlasting burnings.

And very happy is that man, whose fears and thoughtful-

ness have had this blessed effect upon him, to bring him from the power of Satan unto God.

But even then we must not lay our fear aside. "Let him (saith the Apostle) that thinketh he standeth," and that he standeth out of danger, "take heed lest he fall;" for he is yet within the reach of temptations; and that very fear and seriousness of mind, which brought him into the way of life, will ever be necessary to keep and to confirm him in it. This being the best disposition by which we may most effectually secure the grace of God. So saith the Psalmist: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit." 1 Cor. 10. 12. Ps. 34. 18.

He is nigh unto them, to bring to their remembrance their former iniquities; to shew them the sad dangers they have escaped, and the sad condition they had been in, had not He vouchsafed them the grace of repentance, and cured them of that sinful security which is the ruin of an infinite number of souls.

He is nigh unto such, to make them mindful of their infirmities and of their backslidings, that they may be more importunate for grace for the time to come; that they may *watch* and be *sober,* and keep the heart with all diligence; which are duties so difficult, that nothing but the presence of God can enable them to go through.

Besides all this; this serious temper is generally attended with a *tenderness of conscience,* a blessing which we should very highly value, if we would but consider its advantages.

A temptation may be sudden. A man may not always have time to weigh the evil tendency of an action; he may not always know what his duty requires of him; but if his conscience is tender, he will abstain from all appearance of evil. He will likewise keep a faithful watch over himself, lest by giving way to the least known sin, he soon fall into a much greater.

Such a man will call to mind the torments of a guilty conscience, the difficulties of a true repentance, the danger of being given over to a reprobate mind; and these fearful considerations will serve, instead of *time* to consider, instead of *friends* to advise with, instead of *knowledge* to direct, in time of temptation.

SERM. XI.

Add to all this, that a *serious temper*, a *thoughtful heart*, will contribute very much to make us *devout;* without which, no man must hope to be saved.

If a man fears God's displeasure, he will often supplicate His mercy. The fear of offending God will put us upon asking His grace upon every occasion; the fear of our enemies will force us to beg of God His help and protection; and the fear of being ungrateful will mind us of our duty, to be thankful for every favour we every moment receive. This is to live in dependance upon God, which is the great end of religion, and will preserve a true peace of mind and conscience, without which no man can be happy.

A man may indeed lay his conscience asleep; may resolve to see no danger, nor believe that his condition is deplorable; and by this means he may enjoy a false peace of mind. A man may reject such thoughts as are most proper to awaken him into a sense of his misery, or he may silence his conscience. But peace of conscience must have its beginning from a fear of God, and a firm faith in His Word.

God has proposed terms on which He will be reconciled unto us: these terms we receive, and solemnly promise to observe them. We meet with difficulties; this makes us more diligent. Sometimes we fall or go astray; this makes us more careful. When God sees us doing our best, He pities and forgives us. This makes us still more desirous to please Him; serious in praying for assistance; avoiding all temptations which may draw us from His service; always
Heb. 4. 1. fearing, as the Apostle advises, "lest a promise being made us of entering into His rest, we should come short of it."

So that the more fearful a christian is for himself, and of offending God, the more assurance he has of being in God's favour, and the greater peace of conscience: so saith the
Acts 9. 31. Spirit expressly of the first christians; "they walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."

Directly contrary to this, are the fruits of *security*, and of a *careless life:* for these are, negligence; bold venturing upon temptations; a wicked life; and a reprobate mind: enough, one would think, to awaken the most drowsy sinner.

And now, good christians, you see how absolutely necessary
[1Pet.1.17.] the Apostle's direction was, "that we should pass the time

of our sojourning here (our whole life) in fear;" that is, with a concern suitable to what we are like to lose and suffer, if we do not do so. Might not one expect, therefore, to see christians, who know all this, very *thoughtful* and *inquisitive* about the way of salvation; taking heed to their ways; abstaining from all appearance of evil; always preserving themselves in a serious and devout temper of mind?

Why truly, one might expect this: but experience, sad experience, shews the contrary; and that christians, the generality of christians, do live as if there were no manner of danger, nothing to be feared; as if nobody had ever miscarried; as if fear and circumspection, and a serious temper, had never been enjoined us; but that we should all be happy, all go to heaven when we die, without ever concerning ourselves how we live.

But be assured of it, christians, that *sobriety, watchfulness,* a *fear of offending God,* are duties as necessary to our salvation, as our daily bread is to keep us alive. Necessary, I say, at all times, for all conditions of life, to people of all ages, in all affairs, in all employments, in all our dealings with men, in all our approaches to God, in prosperity, in poverty, and even in the common actions of life. In all these circumstances and conditions, christians are obliged to live with *fear* and *caution,* as they hope for heaven.

They that are *young,* if they are not brought up in the fear of God, will contract evil habits before they are aware, which may stick to them as long as they live, and carry them to hell when they die. And if they that are *old* have been destitute of this grace, and neglect to labour and to pray for it with all their might, they must soon perish undoubtedly.

If the *rich* have not the fear of God, and a very great share of grace, their riches will be a snare and a curse to them, and will be a means of shutting them out of heaven. And even the *poor,* who have so many promises, and so favourable a title to the kingdom of heaven, if they want this grace, will be apt to grow impatient, and will endeavour to better their condition by unjust ways.

Indeed, we shall have perpetual occasion for this grace, and a serious temper.

In our *devotions,* that we may not mock God, and draw

SERM. XI.

near to Him with our mouths when our hearts are far from Him. That when we go to church without reverence, and godly fear, we may know for certain that we return home without His blessing.

If we want this grace, we shall be tempted, in our dealings with others, to *oppress*, to *defraud*, to *over-reach*, our brother, not remembering "that the Lord is the avenger of all such." [1 Thess. 4. 6.]

Who would expose himself to any inconveniences, any temporal loss, to the displeasure of men; who would deny himself any pleasures; who would not enrich himself at the cost of his neighbour; if the fear of God did not restrain men?

And therefore, we say very justly, when we see men do such things, that they have not the fear of God in their hearts. We say so, and see it in others: would to God we could always see it in ourselves.

In short, as we stand in need, every moment, of God's grace and protection, it behoves us to be every moment in a disposition to ask and to receive His grace; that is, to be ever serious and thoughtful. For, as the devil never leaves off to tempt us, so must we never leave off to watch against his temptations and snares.

I know what the generality of christians will be apt to think of all this. Why all this ado? Our lives will be a burden, if we must be always upon our guard, always afraid of falling.

Be persuaded, good christians, to believe the quite contrary. The fear of God makes men neither *sad*, nor *sour*, nor *melancholy*, nor *dejected*. And if the Wise Man may be trusted, his advice is, "Be thou in the fear of God all the day long; for the heart of the righteous is a continual feast." Prov. 23. 17; [15. 15.]

And whoever hopes to make his life easy, by casting away care, and flinging off the fear of God, will infallibly find this effect; either he must severely pay for it by a bitter repentance, or he must resolve to perish eternally.

A christian who believes this will not sure say, that it is hard for one to be always serious and mindful of their latter end; much less to say, that he is ashamed *to be singular*. For that in truth is to say, 'I am ashamed of getting from

among a crowd of people, who I know are in the very way to destruction.'

After all; it is not so easy to possess our hearts with this concern, with this godly fear, as it is easy to advise to it. It will be necessary, therefore, to lay before you a few very important considerations, proper to possess our hearts with a salutary fear for ourselves.

We should stand amazed to hear a man say, *that he feared not God,* nor what God could do to him; but pray, where is the difference betwixt the case of such a man, and one who has no concern upon him how he may please God, or how he may escape His anger?

Some men's lives are so profligately wicked, that they leave no room even for charity to have any hopes of their salvation. They think neither of heaven nor of hell; and their condition is looked upon by every body to be truly deplorable.

At the same time, there are christians, who through multitude of worldly business, or who having nothing to do but to divert themselves, or pass their lives in pleasures, do think as little, to any saving purpose, of a life to come, as the other; and yet these are hardly believed to be in danger.

Men must have a strange opinion of religion, when they imagine that there needs little or no care to perform what God requires of us. Would we but consider, that our sojourning here on earth is in order to purify our souls, and make us fit for heaven when we die, we should sure think that something more will be required of *us* than of the beasts that perish; and that this will require some care and serious endeavours.

Had we but the courage to ask ourselves a few such questions as these following, we should see plainly the mistake of those who promise themselves heaven, without taking care and pains to fit themselves for it.

What was I sent into the world for? What have I been doing ever since I came into it? I profess to believe, that when I die, I shall be either happy or miserable, and that this will depend upon my behaviour here. Has my behaviour been regulated according to the rules set me by God, Who is to reward me?

SERM. XI.

As soon as I came to know myself, and my own nature, I found it extremely corrupt: have I taken pains to mend it? I came into a very corrupt world: have I been afraid for myself, and of being made worse by its evil example? I found myself weak, and subject to fall: did I continually implore the Divine assistance, Whose assistance was promised me, when I should beg it sincerely?

God has promised to pardon sinners upon their repentance; but has my repentance been followed by amendment of life?

I am assured, that whoever is truly sensible of the mercy and goodness of God, cannot choose but love Him with all the heart. Have I been careful to call to mind the instances of His goodness to me? Have I taken pains to conquer that perverseness of my nature, which is unwilling to forgive others, though my own pardon depends upon it?

A few such questions as these will awaken a man into a sense of his danger, if his life has not been a state of care and concern for his everlasting welfare.

In short; heaven and happiness is what every soul of us depends on; and we should *any of us* be filled with unspeakable horror, if we had not hopes of being saved when we die.

Let us have the patience but to ask this short question: why do I hope for salvation? If I have indeed thought of it with seriousness; if I have laboured for it with diligence; if I have been afraid of miscarrying; if I have duly prayed for God's assistance, and have closed with the means of salvation which He has ordained; why then I may hope for salvation from a merciful God. But to hope for happiness without doing any thing to obtain it, is the hope of madmen, or of hypocrites, whose sentence has already been passed: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness." "Cut down the unfruitful tree; why encumbereth it the ground?"

[Matt. 25. 30.]
[Luke13.7.]

Let then every christian who hopes for happiness consider, what the conditions are on which God has promised His servants eternal happiness; how many have been ruined for not performing these conditions. Then let him consider what the Spirit of God hath declared, "that broad is the way, and wide is the gate, that leadeth to destruction;" and what if it

[Matt. 7. 13.]

should be my sad lot to be one of those many that go in thereat?

Have I no reason to fear miscarrying? Have I no enemies to be afraid of? Has the world no longer any snares, no temptations? Is Satan no longer "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" finding them off their guard, and from under God's protection? Why then are we so often warned, to *fear;* to be *sober;* to be upon our *watch* continually? Have we no examples of people given up to *work all iniquity with greediness?* [1 Pet. 5. 8.] [Eph. 4. 19.]

But, you will say, you have thought of these things. And have you, therefore, no longer reason to be afraid? Are christians no longer subject to backslidings? Does not every man's heart witness against him, that he has often, very often, broke his resolutions? And is there no fear of doing so again?

But God, you say, is *infinitely merciful:* indeed He is so, or else no man would have been saved.

But let us christians consider, that God is *true* as well as good; and He will be merciful to us according to the terms He has set down in His holy Word. They that will not submit to these terms must inevitably feel the effects of His severe justice; or else, to what purpose is the book of God filled with judgments threatened, and judgments executed, upon impenitent sinners, but to give those that survive just impressions and reasons for fear?

And then, if we add to these reasons the manifold transgressions of our whole lives, the punishment of which is only suspended on condition that we repent and persevere; if we set before our eyes the holiness of that religion which we profess; the majesty of God, to Whose eyes all things are naked and open, Who requires of His servants a sincere endeavour after holiness, and Whose anger is to be dreaded more than death; when we consider, that our lives are not in our own power, and that, within a very few years, we shall every soul of us be in another world: verily, whoever dare think of these things, and are not concerned and fearful for themselves; they must be such, who, as the Prophet speaks, "have made a covenant with death;" that is, who fear no evil, no judgments. Isa. 28. 15.

SERM. XI.

But christians, who have any concern for themselves, will see their danger, and will prostrate themselves before God, and pray Him to put and preserve His fear in their hearts; and to give them all that seriousness, care, and concern, that is necessary to keep them awake, and mindful of what must come hereafter.

These duties may indeed discourage ignorant people, and such as have no care for their souls; for such people look only on the difficulties of a regular life, but know nothing of the happiness of such a life. For example: they do not see what *snares, dangers,* and *troubles,* a christian escapes, who is careful of his ways, and is for that reason under the direction of a good Providence. They do not feel with what peace that christian lieth down at night, who hath feared and shunned every evil of the day past; nor with what comfort he riseth in the morning, who is resolved, by the grace of God, to walk circumspectly that whole day. Nor, lastly, will careless people believe, with what peace that man will give up the ghost, who so orders his life, that when his Lord cometh he may be found watching.

All serious people understand, that there is great recompence in such blessings as these for all their care; and for such as are not yet become serious, the best service one can do such is to pray with the Psalmist, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that they may know themselves to be but men;" that they may see their great danger before it be too late to prevent it.

Ps. 9. 20.

After all, some unfortunate people will be apt to think, that their fears are too great already; and that they rather want advice to lessen them. And indeed it must not be denied, but that fear may exceed its just bounds, and even hinder our serving God as we ought to do. Our great enemy aiming at two things; either to make us careless and fearless, which is a state of perdition, as you have already heard; or else to plunge men into despair of obtaining pardon, of overcoming the corruption of their nature, or of pleasing God by any thing that they can do.

And Satan very often takes advantage of the disorders of the body, to heighten such people's fears, as far as God shall permit him, towards despair.

But they that fear God, their comfort is, that they are in the hands of God, and that no power on earth or hell can touch them any farther than God judges it shall be for their eternal advantage.

And this should keep them from impatience, from repining at God's dealings with them, from charging Him foolishly; and make them more importunate for grace to secure them (as far as God thinks fit) from both these extremes,—from a *sinful security*, and from *causeless fear;* that they may serve Him "acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Heb. 12. 28.

There is another fear which we are far from recommending, and that is, *a slavish fear;* such as wicked people, until their consciences are seared, do always labour under—a fear of the vengeance of God for the wickedness they are not willing to forsake.

But this *slavish fear* is easily known from that religious fear recommended in the text. A slave looks for no favour when he has done amiss; he hates the master he fears; he is obedient only for fear of punishment, and has no concern but to hide his faults. On the contrary, a child of God is afraid indeed when he has done amiss; but he remembers, that *He* is a *Father* whom he has offended, and with an humble confidence hopes for His pardon, and loves Him the more because He is so good as to forgive him.

You see by this time, my christian brethren, what I have aimed at; namely, to recommend to you a *serious temper*, which is the true christian frame of mind and spirit. That this consists in loving God, and fearing to offend Him, and lastly, in resolving to amend wherever we are sensible we have done amiss.

I consider that the approaching season [Lent] is observed by all serious christians with a more than ordinary regard for religious duties.

Many, it is to be hoped, will call themselves to an account for the errors of their lives past, and make sober resolutions of amendment for the time to come.

Such as are sensible that they have transgressed through intemperance, have a good occasion offered them of taking revenge upon themselves by mortification and self-denial;

SERM. XI.

for misspending their time, by retirement; and for neglect of duty, by resolving upon, and setting about the duties of their proper calling, with more care and diligence.

Such as have been at variance will take this occasion of labouring to be reconciled, and to forgive, as they hope for forgiveness themselves at God's hands.

They that are engaged in a sinful way of living of any kind should consider, that this may be the last opportunity offered them by God, of beginning a repentance not to be repented of.

In short; we should all take this occasion of considering, (and this the most ignorant can do, as well as the most learned,) that we have not long to sojourn here; that death is ever at hand, and to be surprised would be the most dreadful thing in the world, for that we shall rise out of the grave just as we lie down in it, either the objects of God's wrath, or of His mercy to all eternity; that therefore we should at all times endeavour to preserve ourselves in a serious temper of mind, and avoid every thing that may make us forget that we have souls capable of the extremest misery if not taken care of; that we are sure to be most happy when we die, if we are careful to please God while we live; and

Lastly, that whenever we suffer ourselves to grow *unthoughtful, indifferent,* and *careless,* we are in greater danger than we are aware of, of hardening ourselves against all motives and means of salvation, the fear of hell, and the hopes of heaven.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, let it be seen, by the seriousness of our lives, that we hope to go to heaven when we die.

Which God grant, for Jesus Christ's sake, our most blessed Lord and Saviour.

SERMON XII.

THE CHARACTERS OF A FAITHFUL SERVANT CONSIDERED, AND APPLIED (FOR OUR DIRECTION AND COMFORT), AS WE ARE THE SERVANTS OF GOD

MATTHEW XXV. 20, 21.

He that had received five talents, came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

THE more thoughtful people are, the more apt are they to be cast down with the remembrance of their *imperfections* and *failings;* while they that are less careful of their ways are apt to run into *another* extreme, and *hope well for themselves, not always* with good reason.

Now all this proceeds from people's having *wrong apprehensions of God.* And there is no way so likely to free our minds from *false hopes* on one hand, and on the other from *unreasonable fears,* as this: to consider well *the way of speaking* which our blessed Saviour has made use of in the Gospel, to convey to us *just* and *worthy* notions of God, and the relation we bear to Him.

For instance: sometimes He calls God Our *Father,* to assure, and shew us, with what goodness and compassion He will treat us, if we behave ourselves like dutiful children. Sometimes He is called a *Judge,* to imprint upon our minds, what an impartial sentence we must expect from *His* justice. Sometimes He is called a *King,* to shew us the authority He has over us; and that, as a mighty prince, He has power to punish His rebellious subjects, who will not return to their

SERM. XII.

duty and obedience. And to mention no more, God is *here* represented as our *Lord* and *Master,* to put us in mind of the work we have to do, the account we are to give, and the reward we may expect if we continue His faithful servants unto our lives' end.

Now, as the Spirit of God has thought fit to make use of such expressions as these, *so well understood by all sorts of people,* we may certainly conclude, that He will deal with us accordingly; namely, as *a wise and good father* would deal with his children, with great tenderness and affection, while they do their best to please him. As a *prudent prince* would govern his subjects, with mildness, or severity, as they are good or otherwise. And lastly, as a just and *bountiful master;* not requiring of his servants more than they are able to perform, bearing with their mistakes where they are not wilful, and making good all his promises, when they shall have done their work.

And it is for want of having *these characters of God* before their eyes, that people very often entertain *wild* or *unjust* thoughts of *Him* and *His ways;* make their lives uncomfortable, and their religion a burden, by entertaining themselves with *unreasonable fears,* while they should be *endeavouring to do their duty* in that state of life unto which the providence of God has called them, which will be found to be the best assurance any man *can* have, that he is a *servant* of God, that he is in the *way of salvation,* and that if he continues in *this way* he shall be approved of God, and admitted into heaven at the last.

Now, the relation betwixt *masters* and *servants* being easy to be understood, and God being pleased to express, *by such a relation,* His purpose of dealing with us hereafter, I choose these words, in order to explain and settle in our hearts a true notion of *faithfulness* or *sincerity,* that we may have the comfort of knowing when we are *safe,* and that we may *not be secure* and *easy* when we really are *not* so.

And first, the words may imply thus much: that *as servants to the great Lord of the world, we must all give an account of the talents which He has given us.* This consideration will be apt to make us serious, and concerned for the *issue of such an account.*

Then what follows is expressly contained in the text; namely, 1st, *The approbation of God;* "Well done, thou good and faithful servant:" 2ndly, the *reason* of such approbation; "thou hast been faithful:" 3rdly, the *reward* of being so; "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." From which necessarily follows *this truth:* that every man who is faithful to husband the talents which God has given him; or, in other words, who shall do his duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call him, shall certainly be saved.

But then this question very naturally comes into our minds: how shall I know that I am one of those faithful servants to whom such rewards will be given? how may I hope that God will accept of my service; especially when my own heart tells me, that I *have* done, and am *subject* to do, many things amiss? Why, pray, how does a *well-meaning servant* know when he may expect his master's *pardon, approbation,* and *favour?* does he not consider what are the *characters* of a *good* and *faithful servant?* And if he is conscious to himself that he acts like such a one, is he not easy and satisfied; and does he not, with some assurance, depend upon what has been promised him as a reward of his labours?

To come then to the main design of this discourse. Let us consider what are the characters of a *faithful servant* with *respect to men;* and then let us see how we may apply these characters, *as we are the servants of God,* for our *direction* and *comfort.*

Now, if a man enters into service, with a full purpose of observing all his master's just commands; if he truly performs what he promises, and what he is put in trust with, and honestly employs his time and abilities for the honour and advantage of his master; if he patiently submits to be reproved; or, upon calling himself to an account, mends where he has done amiss; we count such a person *a good servant;* and should be ready to conclude *that master* unreasonable, who would not be pleased with and reward his service. On the contrary, a *wise* and *good master* will make great allowances for failings which are unavoidable; he knows that the most *faithful servant* may *mistake,* may be often at a loss what to do for the best, may not always be able to do what he knows he ought to do.

SERM. XII.

In all these, and many more instances of failings, which do not proceed from *carelessness*, from *contempt of authority*, or from a wilful *contracted laziness*; but rather from *weakness, surprise*, or other *infirmity*, to which all men are more or less subject; in all such cases, a good man treats his servant with compassion and forgiveness.

And will not THE LORD OF ALL THE EARTH be as *just*, as *kind*, and *merciful*, as any of His creatures? And may we not be as easy and as secure from fear of an angry resentment in *His*, as in the most indulgent service? Yes sure; provided we do indeed deserve the character *of good and faithful servants*, having *His pleasure* and *honour* most at heart; and desiring to approve ourselves to Him in every thing we do. It is not consistent with *infinite mercy*, that such should finally miscarry; and we may very safely conclude, that whatever is truly *reasonable*, or *just*, or *kind*, amongst men, *all this* will be found, and much more than can be expressed, in God's dealings with us.

But to be more particular, and to apply this to the service we owe to our GREAT LORD AND MASTER. Whoever would approve himself to be *His faithful servant*, and have a title to the reward of being so, must lay himself under these following *obligations*, which will be a sure *test* of his *faithfulness* or *sincerity*, and consequently a *sure foundation of peace*.

First; He must resolve to obey God in all things, to the best of his understanding and power.

Secondly; He must employ his gifts and graces for the honour of his Lord and Master, in the discharge of such duties as his state of life obliges him to.

Lastly; He must call himself often to an account, whether he does so or not, and make use of the means of grace in order to know and to do his duty.

To keep to these rules will secure a man in the favour of God; and to fail notoriously in any one of these will occasion *endless scruples* in a mind fearful of what may come hereafter, and greatly hazard one's salvation; as will appear, now we come to consider the *importance* and the *consequences* of observing or neglecting them.

I. And first; *a resolution of obeying God, to the best of our understanding and power*, is both *reasonable* and *necessary*.

It is *reasonable*, on account of God's authority over us; of the assurance we have, that all His commands are just, and for our good; and because of the reward we may hope for from such an obedience. It is *necessary*, both to lay a bias upon the will, to enlighten the understanding, and to keep the mind in perfect peace.

It will *lay a bias upon the will*, which is of greater consequence than is usually imagined; for certainly it is a great matter to be determined beforehand, that no consideration whatever shall prevail with me to do disservice to or to displease God, *if I know it*. For then I have no other dispute with myself, when I come to act, but this: Is this the *will of God?* Is this an action worthy of one who pretends to be His devoted servant? Is this consistent with the vows that are upon me, and with my hopes of heaven?

And this has been the way of good men, and *their security:* "I have sworn, and am purposed, to keep Thy righteous judgments," saith the Psalmist: that is, I am determined at all times *what to do; to do the will of my Lord and Master, when I know it*, without consulting my own will, my passions, or worldly interest. [Ps. 119. 106.]

But for a man, when a temptation lies in his way, to be at liberty to wish that God had not forbidden him the thing he desires; to question whether the penalty of breaking His laws will be greater than the pleasure of following his own inclinations; to be at liberty to hope that the *goodness* of God may perhaps pardon, where His *justice* has so severely threatened: *this* would be a *fatal liberty*. It would be parleying with our corrupt appetites, which are often too strong even for our most settled resolutions; much more when we are undetermined what to do until we are forced to act; when the present *pleasure*, or *profit*, or *passion*, will too likely prevail with us to forget the rewards or punishments of a future life.

Such a resolution is necessary, on account of the *peace of mind*, and *security from fear of evil*, it gives us.

Sincerity consists in an inclination and readiness of mind *to learn* and *to do* the will of God. Wherever this is found, there may be *mistakes*, there may be *failings*, there may be *sins of infirmity*, but there cannot possibly be such a *perverse-*

SERM. XII.

ness of the will, or a *corruption of manners,* as will exclude us the service of God, or forbid us hoping for His *pardon, favour,* and *blessing,* provided we choose not ways of serving Him of our own devising, but make use of, and value, *the means of grace* which His wisdom and goodness has appointed for our instruction, assistance, and salvation.

Lastly; such a resolution and readiness to do the will of God, will be a powerful means of understanding at all times

[John 7.17.] *what the will of our Lord is.* "He that will do the will of God" (saith our Saviour), that is, he who desires to do it, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself."

The truth appears to men just as they are disposed to receive it; and it is not always for want of reason, that men do not believe or know the truth, but generally from an un-

[Matt. 13. 14; Is. 6. 9.] willingness to receive and to obey it. "Hearing ye shall hear and not understand," saith our Saviour: and yet this was *their condemnation,* which could *not* have been, unless the will of God had been plainly made known to them. And

[2 Tim. 3. 4.] it was *their crime* as well as *their punishment,* that *pride, self-conceit, worldly-mindedness,* being *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,* unfitted them for understanding the truth, made the Son of God become a *stumbling-block,* and an offence to them to whom He came with terms of salvation.

In one word; Jesus Christ has made the way of life *plain,* not by requiring us to know a great deal, but by obliging us to an honest use of what we know; by giving us *few rules,* which He expects we should remember and observe; by setting us *an example,* which He demands we should imitate; and by affording us *means of grace,* which He requires us to make use of as we hope for happiness. And we may judge of our *sincerity,* and consequently *of our state with God,* by comparing our love for *Him* and *His* service with any other passion.

A covetous man, for instance, hears proposals of gain from strangers, from inferiors, and even from enemies. There needs no apology be made to excuse the liberty of speaking to him upon *that subject;* one need not bid him have a care of his interest; he will be sure to do that if he knows it. He is very watchful of those that would wrong him; and will

not knowingly do any thing which shall affect and hurt his great design of *enriching himself.* In short, he does all this as naturally as he lives, because his heart is set upon this *one* thing, *the increasing his substance.*

From which we may set down these *sure marks of our sincerity towards God.* First, that we never consent to known iniquity. 2ndly, that we are never uneasy to hear the truth and know our duty. And lastly, that we make use of those means of knowing and doing our duty which God has directed us to.

Thus will our love to God be sincere and manifest. We shall love to please Him; we shall easily understand what *will* please Him; and we shall be at peace with ourselves, and secure from fear of anger from so good a master.

II. But then, *we must be sure to employ all our gifts and graces, all the talents He bestows upon us, for His honour, in discharging the proper duties of our callings.* For this is another character of a *good and faithful servant:* "thou hast been faithful;" that is, thou hast employed the talents I gave thee, in the business I appointed thee. That man, therefore, cannot be called a *good servant,* who will choose what business he himself pleaseth, to employ his time, and thoughts, and labour upon, and not what his Lord has assigned him, and qualified him for.

And yet *infinite* are the disorders and instances of this nature, and *fatal* the consequences, while people neglect their proper business for what they think a better way of spending their time.

Can a man, qualified for and dedicated to the more immediate service of God, innocently engage himself in *worldly business* inconsistent with such an employment? The same Lord, Who has ordained "that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel," has at once appointed the *duty* and the *support* of those that serve at the altar. [1 Cor. 9. 14.]

But more criminal is the *indiscreet zeal* of those who go into the service before they are sent, and will be teachers of others, before their Lord has declared them qualified for such an office. Will He approve of such a servant? Will He accept, will He reward his service?

If we consider how few are appointed to govern, in com-

SERM. XII.

parison of those whose duty it is to obey, one would wonder to find so many of all conditions, as much engaged in modelling the world, and censuring the conduct of those who are *bound* to govern, as if *all* were to *command*, and none to obey. And yet, our Lord is *a God of Order*, and would have all His servants to keep their station, and to observe the duties of their calling; some of which are indeed common to all christians: to promote the glory of God; to be examples of piety; to discountenance vice; to comfort the afflicted; and to minister to the necessities of the poor and miserable.

In all which duties, there is a very great latitude left, that people may have an opportunity of manifesting their zeal and piety towards God, and their compassion and charity towards men.

But the *duties* of OUR *calling* are limited to *particular* persons, as the providence of God has ordered it. And every man will have enough to do, to see his own duties handsomely discharged, without engaging in those in which he has nothing to do.

If parents and masters govern their children and servants well; if these are dutiful and faithful to them; if magistrates act as if they had a master in heaven; and they that ought to obey do it for conscience sake; if men are just in their dealings one with another, and cheerfully aim at the public good; there is no better way of *promoting the glory of God*, and *securing our title to heaven*.

It is by these things we approve ourselves *christians indeed;* manifest *our faith* by *our works;* and are more sure that we are under the conduct of the Spirit of God, by a faithful discharge of these relative duties, than by any other instance or pretence whatever.

Even *fasting*, and *prayer*, and *alms*, or any other acts or expressions of devotion, are nothing in the account of God, if we do not hereby become better *men*, better *neighbours*, better *christians*, in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call us.

III. The last character of a faithful servant is, *that he often calls himself to an account; amends where he has done amiss; and uses proper means for avoiding mistakes for the time to come.*

This is found necessary in the common concerns of life; much more is it so with respect to our duty to God, and *the concerns of eternity;* lest we fall into such *ignorance,* or *inconsideration,* as will lead us into sin without thinking of it. For then, our sins are as much *wilful,* as if we should say in our hearts, this we *will* do though we know God has forbidden us.

It is a dangerous error we are apt to run into:—we are in *a good way;* we find ourselves *hearty in it;* we resolve to pursue it as long as we live; and we apprehend no danger, or that ever we shall miscarry, having given ourselves to God's service. But then, we do not remember, that all the intimations of Scripture, which speak of the danger of *drawing back,* of *falling away,* are all to no purpose, if, as long as we are in this world, we were not liable to be undone; if we continue not *faithful unto death,* careful of our ways even unto our lives' end; which it is *not possible to do,* without *calling ourselves often to an account,* and charging ourselves with the errors we have committed, in order to avoid them for the future.

By this means, if we have done any action which either was in itself, or in the manner of doing it, unfit to be done by *a servant of God,* or to an end unworthy of a Christian, and we resolve to forbear that for the time to come, to avoid all occasions of temptation, and use such means as are proper to prevent a relapse; by doing this, we know what we have to answer for, we keep *peace* with God, and keep all *quiet* within.

On the other hand, very *dreadful* have been the consequences of *neglecting this duty.* People have forgot themselves, their vows, their duty, and their God; have fallen in love with sins, which once they abhorred; and have increased their accounts to such a length, that nothing but the sight of death could force them to look upon them. The consequence of which has *too often* been *confusion* and *despair.*

But why should we ever suffer matters to come to this extremity? Why should we neglect or be afraid to see how our accounts stand betwixt *us* and *our Lord?*

Blessed be God, that we serve a Master Who knows our infirmities, Who will accept of our repentance, and forgive all

SERM. XII.

that is past, if we sincerely purpose to serve Him more faithfully. A Master, Who will command us nothing but what is reasonable and for our good; Who cannot mistake our honest intentions, and will accept of our sincere endeavours instead of a perfect obedience; and Who will reward us, *not according to our works,* but *according to His mercy and promise in Jesus Christ.* Here is no room for *complaint,* no room for *fear,* much less for *despair.*

[2 Tim. 1. 9; Tit. 3. 5.]

Let such as are *most apt to despond* view a *servant,* who is always prepared to do his lord's will, is always pleased to know it, is angry with himself whenever it has been his misfortune to have done amiss, and takes more care for the time to come not to run into mistakes. On the other hand, let him look upon the *lord of that servant,* as very desirous of the welfare of his whole family; reasonable in all his commands, concerned to have his household carefully instructed in their duty, easy to be intreated when matters have gone wrong, satisfied with the *good meaning* and *honest endeavours* of such as could not come up to the utmost of their duty; lastly, just to all his promises, and kind to his faithful servants beyond their expectations. No man, who considers that this is really the character, these the properties, of the Lord of the world, can despair of approving himself to God, unless this be his case, *that he cannot resolve to become the faithful servant just now described.*

But whether we are *faithful* or *otherwise,* accountable we *must* be, whether we will or no. We have *all* received talents, even those that think they have been most overlooked; and we must all one day answer for the use we have made of them.

It is true, our Lord and Master is kind and good; but then He is *just* as well as merciful; and if His gifts are neglected, His promises despised, His commands broken without regret, and His goodness abused, He *can* be *severe,* He *has been so* in instances innumerable, and He has declared that He will be so, and give to every man according to his works, whether they have done good or evil.

God Almighty make us all truly sensible of this, that we may *fear* where we have reason so to do, and be *cheerful* where we have none; that we may have always in our eye

the *prize* of our calling, which will be sufficient to encourage us under difficulties, excite our best endeavours, and reward all our labours.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XIII.

TRUE REPENTANCE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

Awaken, O God, the spirit of repentance in this drowsy, thoughtless world, which stands so much in need of it; make me a faithful, successful preacher of true repentance; pour down Thy Holy Spirit upon my heart, and upon the hearts of all that shall hear these truths, that we may all repent and turn to God with all our hearts, and bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

MATTHEW iii. 8—10.

Prov.28.13; Is. 55. 6, 7; Jer.3.12,13; Ezek.18.27; Mark 6.12; 2 Cor. 7. 10.

Bring forth fruits meet for repentance; (that is, answerable to amendment of life;) *and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

THESE words discover to us a truth which most christians are not aware of, and which they will be surprised at when they hear it; and it is this; *that too many are ruined, not so much by their sins, as by their very repentance;* that is, they mistake, and take *that* for repentance which will never do them any service, and which God will never accept of for the pardon of their sins.

Sinners we are, every soul of us, and every soul of us would come short of heaven, if God in mercy had not provided and offered us a remedy for our sins. This remedy is *a true repentance.* Every christian who lays hold of it will most certainly be pardoned, and saved, and be happy for

ever. Every one who despises, neglects, or wilfully mistakes this remedy, will as surely be shut out of heaven, and be punished eternally, as God, and this Word of His are true. The Bible.

If this will not make you very attentive to what I am going to say upon this subject of repentance, I have no other arguments to prevail with you. For this is the very argument, or motive, which the Spirit of God in the text made use of, to awaken the Jewish nation, and to prepare them for receiving the mercies of the Gospel just going to be offered them. "The axe (saith the holy Baptist), the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire:" assuring us by this, that the fruit of *repentance* is that which God expects from us, and which of His great mercy, for Christ's sake, He will accept of; but if this fruit does not appear in our lives, we must expect nothing less than to be cut off by death, and to be burnt with fire unquenchable: there being no other choice for christian people, but *a true repentance* or *ruin.*

Every christian, therefore, who lays any thing to heart, will be glad to be informed from the Word of God;

First, *concerning the reason and necessity of repentance, and in what true repentance does consist.*

Secondly, *what are those mistakes concerning repentance, which christians are liable to fall into.*

And lastly, *how a christian may have the sure comfort of knowing whether his repentance will be accepted of God, for his pardon and salvation.*

And these are the particulars, that by the good grace of God, which I beseech Him to vouchsafe me, I purpose at this time *to lay before you, and to charge upon myself.*

I. I must, first of all, explain to you THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE. Not only John the Baptist, but our Lord Himself and His Apostles, began their ministry by exhorting and requiring people to repent, as they hoped to be saved; plainly shewing, that no man *can* receive the Gospel —*can* be a christian—without forsaking his sins, which are against natural reason and conscience: for he that will not forsake a sin which his own conscience tells him he ought

SERM. XIII.

not to live in, will not receive a revelation which his own reason may tell him comes from God.

This, you see, shews the absolute necessity of repentance, in order to a man's being a christian,—of his receiving the Gospel to any saving purposes.

We are all of us *the sinful race of Adam;* we have, every one of us, the *root*, the *spring*, the *seed*, the *fountain* of *every evil*, within us; and the best of us would be as wicked as the worst we know, if we were left entirely to ourselves. And as it is, the very best of us have done many, many things which are hateful to God; and therefore an holy God could never have taken pleasure in such sinful creatures, had not Jesus Christ put us into a way of regaining His favour, if we will but close with the means of salvation offered them in the Gospel: that is, if men *will repent and turn to God;* if they will forsake their sins, which are hateful to God, *and bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life;* if they do this, they shall be pardoned every sin that is past, and be made happy when they die.

Now, it is for this very end that God has given, and continues to us, our lives; that laying hold of *this* mercy, we may repent, our corrupt nature may be mended, and that we may be restored to the image of God, and be fit for paradise when we die.

This, I say, is God's great design in setting us in this state of trial, *to qualify us for eternal happiness*, and at the same time, to manifest His own most glorious perfections: that we may adore His almighty power, which can enable such poor weak creatures to overcome the greatest difficulties, the temptations of the *flesh*, the *world*, and the *devil;* that we may adore His wonderful *patience*, in bearing with our perverseness; His infinite *mercy* and *goodness*, in pardoning us upon our true repentance; and His severe *justice*, in punishing those who will not be prevailed upon, by so much goodness, to repent, and lead a new life.

By this time, you see the absolute necessity of repentance to salvation, and that *true repentance consists in such a sorrow for having offended God, as is followed by a change of mind, and amendment of life.*

And whether this sorrow proceeded at the first from fear,

or from a concern for having abused the goodness of so gracious a God; yet if it bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life, it will be accepted; that is, if the sinner, being made sensible of the mercy of God for Christ's sake to all true penitents, shall resolve with holy Job,—"Where I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." If he resolves with the people of Israel, "All that the Lord shall command me, that will I do." If these resolutions are followed by an hatred of every thing that a man believes may displease God; by avoiding as much as possible all temptations to sin; by a sincere endeavour to lead an holy and a christian life; and lastly, by using the means which God has ordained to keep us from *backsliding;* such a person is a true penitent, and in the sure way to heaven and happiness.

[Job 34.32.]

[Exod. 19. 8.]

But then, I must not conceal it from you, that all this is not so soon done as advised or resolved upon; the *world,* the *flesh,* and the *devil,* are not so easily *overcome* as *renounced.* Habits of virtue and goodness are not acquired at once; and the way to eternal happiness, our Lord assures us, is narrow and difficult, and will require pains and striving to pass through it safely.

What then must be done? Must we sit still, and be content to perish? That is a frightful thought indeed; and God, to make it still more terrible, has made known to us a truth, that, if attended to, will awaken the most drowsy sinner alive;—*they that have done evil* (lived wicked lives), *and do not repent, shall go into everlasting fire.*

[Matt. 25. 41.]

Few people can hear this without some thoughts and purposes of repentance; but then, to avoid the difficulties of a true repentance, the corrupt heart of man has ever been seeking for expedients to make it more easy and consistent with an unconverted life.

Thus the Jews flattered themselves that God, for the sake of Abraham their father, would pass by *their* faults more easily than those of other people; but the holy Baptist, in the text, assures them to the contrary. And indeed, from the beginning, they were told this in very plain words; and that their being the children of Abraham would not secure them against the displeasure of God. "If ye at all forget the Lord your God, ye shall surely perish, as the nations

Deut. 8. 19, 20.

SERM. XIII.

perished which the Lord destroyed before your face." Notwithstanding this, christians have multiplied these mistakes to the ruin of infinite souls.

II. Many are apt to think, that *repentance is only necessary* when people have fallen into great and crying sins; and that *when they have forsaken such sins,* though for the fear of temporal punishment only, *they are in the way of salvation.* Many imagine that *their repentance is over,* when they have expressed their sorrow for having done amiss, and begged God's pardon. Too many are persuaded that *repentance is in their own power,* and that they can set about it and perform it when they please. And too, too many *put off their repentance* to the very end of their lives.

These are sad mistakes among christians; who will often find to their astonishment those sins charged upon them, which they hoped they had repented of, and were forgiven.

Now, to prevent these mistakes, the Spirit of God has
Acts 3. 19. joined *repentance* and *conversion* together. "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." So that no degree of *sorrow,* no *penance,* no *mortification,* no *confession,* no *absolution,* which is not attended with amendment of life, will avail any thing in the sight of God.

Not only notorious sinners, but all men living, have need of repentance to restore them to the favour of God; and to think that repentance is in our own power without the grace of God, is as absurd, as it would be to think to raise the dead by our own power; the one being as great a miracle as the other.

Let it be observed, moreover, that a short sorrow, and asking pardon of God, is so far from being repentance, that *a christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance;* that is, he *ought,* and he *will,* if he be a true penitent, all his life long lament and strive against the corruption of his nature, and be sorry for the sins he has ever fallen into, whenever he remembers them. He will evermore *watch* over his own heart; oppose every evil inclination; and immediately beg forgiveness of God, whenever any sin has got the mastery of him against his settled purposes.

In short, a christian, for these reasons, will never think himself excused, to his dying day, from *self-denial,* from

watching, and *prayer;* Jesus Christ having made these the *standing means* of repentance unto life.

But the great mistake and delusion of all is *the depending upon a late, a death-bed repentance.*

Christians should consider, that the Spirit of God, by requiring us *to bring forth fruits meet for repentance,* has shewed us the absurdity, the danger, the inexpressible danger, of putting off our repentance *till the night come when no* [John 9. 4.] *man can work.*

And indeed, every body must see that there would be no necessity of a good life, if a man may be unjust, or unmerciful, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an adulterer, a profaner of God, His name, or His ordinances, and yet may hope for mercy when he comes to die, upon his being sorry for his wicked life, and begging God's pardon.

Let it be further considered, that God has positively declared, that He will render to every man according to his works. Now, if a man has done no good works (after his repentance) to balance his evil deeds, what can he hope for but judgment without mercy?

In short, though an evil liver should, when he comes to die, be never so sorry for his sins, and resolve sincerely to change his life, yet such a person has no promise from God, that his repentance shall be accepted: the promise you have heard, is to such as repent and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And accordingly the tree, that had not brought forth good fruit, after patience and pains had been spent on it in vain, was to be *cut down and burnt.*

I know very well what will be said to this, *that it may drive dying sinners to despair;* but I am not now speaking to *dying sinners;* I am speaking to such as have it in their power, by the grace of God, to repent before they come into that sad condition, which no man in his right mind would venture his soul upon *for this whole world.*

There were cases under the law which God reserved to Himself, even so *we* must leave the fate of a *death-bed repentance* to the uncovenanted mercy of God.

There have been persons so unhappily educated, and so extremely ignorant, that when they have come to die, it has appeared that they knew nothing almost of their *duty,* or

SERM. XIII.

their *danger*. Such pitiable circumstances may find mercy with God; but such as live in a continued course of sin, rejecting the means of instruction, despising the means of conversion, hardening themselves against all methods of God for their salvation; such can have little comfort administered unto them when they come to die. Nor will any minister or priest of God, who understands the Gospel and his duty, dare to give any assurance, or other advice, to such unhappy people, than to exhort them to do all that is in their power, and to leave the issue to God; to confess, and detest, their hatred and contempt of God, and His laws, with the utmost abhorrence: to let all that come to see them know what an evil and bitter thing it is, when one comes to die, to look back upon an ill-spent life; to warn them, as they love their own souls, to repent in time, lest they also come into that state of torment. And lastly, to accept of sorrow and anguish of mind, as a just punishment, and such as their case requires.

Such humiliations as these will have their weight with God; if not to pardon their sins, yet at least to lessen their punishment, and to keep them from despair.

III. We come now to consider *how a christian may have the comfort of knowing whether his repentance be such as will be accepted of God for his pardon and salvation.*

And, in the first place, every man living may have the comfort of knowing *assuredly,* that his sins, *though never so great,* will be pardoned upon his true repentance. We have
Mark 3. 28. the word and the oath of the Son of God for this: "Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men."

And every christian may be assured, that if God has given him the spirit of *repentance,* that is, a fear for himself; a sorrow for having offended God; a desire of returning to his duty, and of being reconciled to his Maker: he may be assured, that his sin is not *that unpardonable sin* excepted by
[Mark 3. 29.] our Lord, THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST. He may be assured of this, because it is the Holy Ghost Who gives him *this spirit;* Who gives him *grace,* and a *desire,* and a *will,* to repent; Who therefore has not utterly forsaken him: that
1 John 5.16. is, he has not sinned *the sin unto death,* as the Apostle calls it.

His next concern, therefore, must be to look to his *repentance*, that it be such as the Gospel requires; for upon *that*, his safety, and the whole comfort of his life and death depend.

For example: his conscience must witness for him, that he does not live in any known sin; if he does, he is no true penitent, though he has forsaken never so many evil ways. A good christian may indeed fall into a sin, through surprise; through the force of a temptation; for want of keeping a strict watch over himself; but he is no longer a good christian, or a true penitent, if, being made sensible of his fault, he does not immediately repent of it, and resolve to do so no more. Thus did St. Peter; thus did David; and thus will every christian do, who considers that he ventures no less a stake than his own soul, who ventures to live one moment in any known sin.

Secondly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he does not live in a wilful neglect of any known duty. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance." This is the *language*, this the *design*, both of the *Law* and the *Gospel*. Let no man, therefore, comfort himself with saying, that he leads an harmless life. Every man has his proper duty and talents, for which he must answer; so that no man can say he leads an *harmless life*, who leads an *useless life*, or who neglects the duties of his place and state of life. Isa. 1. 16, 17. [Matt. 3. 8.]

Thirdly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he keeps *a strict watch* over himself, for *fear of backsliding*. "Watch and pray, that ye fall not into temptation." This is a Gospel rule, never to be dispensed with, never to be forgotten; without which no man can be secure of his perseverance. Matt. 26. 41.

Lastly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he strives to please God in every thing to the best of his power. This is the surest proof of a christian's sincerity, and of the truth of his *repentance*, when he can say, this I avoid, this I abhor, because I believe it will displease God; when he can truly say, this I *do*, this I *undertake*, this I *suffer*, because I believe it is the will of God, and will be for His glory. Whoever is in this way is a true penitent, his

SERM. XIII.

sins will be forgiven, and he is in the sure way of salvation; *these being fruits answerable to amendment of life.*

But that a christian may keep in this way, it will be necessary that he call himself often to an account; that every night he beg forgiveness of those sins which through frailty he has committed the day past; and that he omit none of those means which God has ordained to keep christians from backsliding, and from falling into the snare of the devil: one of which the Church has provided in her daily service,—a standing and an effectual means of obtaining pardon for all such as sincerely close with it; that is, for all such as having with all true humility confessed their sins unto God, do secretly beg of Him, that the *pardon pronounced by His own minister* may become effectual for the forgiveness of all their sins.

Only remember, that it is a mere mocking of God to confess our sins, without a sincere purpose of forsaking them; and that the absolution pronounced by the priest of God will only benefit those *who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God.* And to *such*—to such as are *truly penitent*—the daily absolution will be an invaluable blessing and comfort, even as great as it is to be satisfied, *that their pardon is sealed in heaven.*

Another means of grace, and pardon, and salvation, is offered us in the *sacrament* of the *Lord's Supper.* And a christian must be very ignorant, or very little concerned for his salvation, who will turn his back upon that ordinance, which is designed to seal unto all worthy receivers the pardon of all their sins.

By this time, I hope you see, and are convinced, that *repentance* is not so much a *law* imposed upon you, as a *favour* and a *privilege of the Gospel;* that it is the greatest mercy vouchsafed unto sinners, who, when they have forfeited the favour of God, are not utterly cast off, but have the promise of pardon, and this upon most reasonable terms.

But then we must be careful not to abuse this great privilege; that we be not bold to provoke God, because He has been so good as to promise to pardon us upon our true repentance; always remembering, that *God's great design* in accepting of our repentance is this, *that we may live to His*

glory the remainder of our days; that we may shew in our conversion, the *power* of His grace, the *riches* of His goodness and mercy, the *faithfulness* of His promises, and the *holiness* of His laws.

By this you see, *that a christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance;* that we ought, all our days, to be labouring after holiness and perfection, getting the mastery over our corruptions, and doing good in our generation. And we shall not defer this one moment, if we consider that the servant in the Gospel, who had most improved his talents, had the greatest reward; and that the sooner we repent, the more happy we shall be when we die. [Matt. 25. 28, 29.]

This shews the madness of those who will be making experiments, how long they may go on in a careless way of living, and still hope that God will be gracious to them, and accept of their repentance. For there is a time *when* (as God Himself has declared) *He will not be found of them that seek Him.* Besides this, every moment we defer our repentance, we lessen our own happiness.

But above all, let us consider, that repentance is a work of time, of pains, of sorrow, and uneasy to flesh and blood; that the ways of sin are extremely hazardous, and a return to our duty very uncertain: that, therefore, *they* are wise and happy, who are taught betimes to fear God and walk in His ways; who can say with the eldest son in the Gospel, "I never disobeyed thy commands." You know the father's answer, "Son, all that I have is thine." [Luke 15. 29, 31.]

And indeed the goodness of God has so ordered matters, that this might be the happy case of many more christians, if it were not plainly our own fault.

At our *baptism* He gives us His Holy Spirit to be the principle of a new life to us,—an all-powerful Spirit, able to keep us in the ways and in the favour of God to our lives' end.

Were parents careful to instruct their children, how to improve and how to preserve this mighty blessing, what an alteration should we see in the christian world! But, alas! they are suffered to grow up in ignorance, to get evil habits, to grieve the Holy Spirit by which they were sanctified, and very often to fall again into the snare, and power, and king-

SERM. XIII.

dom of Satan. It is then they must be plainly told, that they have no other choice *but repentance or damnation.* And, God knows, this is often told to such as turn a deaf ear to so dreadful a truth. They are in the power of a master who will not suffer them to fear till it be too late to repent, unless the Almighty God, by a miracle of mercy, interpose His power. And this He does sometimes *by the discipline of His Church;* and would oftener do it, did not wicked men oppose this gracious method of His providence for the conversion of sinners.

But then you see the great sin of those, who go about to set at nought, to pull down, or to despise and abuse, such a powerful means of grace and conversion, which has God for its author, and is ordained to remove scandals out of His Church; to awaken and to humble sinners; to prevent their being hardened in wickedness, and from corrupting others; to beget in all a fear of falling; to prevent the judgments of God from falling upon the society; and lastly, to make some reparation to the honour of God for His abused authority. These are the ends of *Church discipline,* and which many a sinner, I hope, has reason to bless God for.

To proceed: by this time, I hope, good christians, you see, *that your everlasting welfare depends upon the sincerity of your repentance;* this being the only way by which a sinner can possibly be restored to the favour of God, and put into the way of salvation. You see that repentance is the gift of God, and that it must be begged of Him with a sincere design of forsaking every evil way.

To encourage us to think, in good earnest, of setting about so necessary a work, God is so good as to offer us all the assistance that we can possibly want: and that we may not flatter ourselves, that it may not be so ill with us as has been intimated, Jesus Christ Himself has told us what will be the punishment of sin unrepented of: *Eternal darkness,—pain of body, and anguish of mind,—unquenchable fire,*—AND THESE FOR EVER!

Will any man, in his right mind, who *hears,* who *believes,* these words of the Son of God, live one moment under the hazard and dread of dying in his sins? If, therefore, any of you, who now hear and understand me, are convinced that

you live in any known sin, or very frequently fall into the same sins; be persuaded, as you love your souls, from this moment to begin your repentance, to forsake every sin, *though as dear to you as a right hand or a right eye.* They are the words of Jesus Christ that I am going to repeat:— "It is better for you to enter into life, halt, or maimed, or with one eye, than to go whole and sound to hell, *into the fire that never shall be quenched;*" which words our Lord repeats *three times,* that christians may never forget them; that they may repent in time, and never go into *that place of torment.* Matt. 18. 8; Mark 9. 43, &c.

You see how dangerous a thing it is to fancy ourselves safe, when indeed we are not so. Think not, therefore, to say to yourselves, We are *christians;* we are members of a body of which Christ is the head, for which He gave His most precious blood; we have the means of grace and salvation amongst us.

Oh, christians! how many souls are there, who, this moment, are bitterly lamenting the ill use they made of these blessings, when they were in this state of trial! Let us, who are yet alive, think seriously of this; and resolve, by the grace of God, to lead a life worthy of the religion we profess, of the means and hopes of salvation, which God has vouchsafed us, and mindful of the misery we are liable to in case we miscarry.

It is easy and it is common to say, *We are all sinners;* but it is not always considered that such sinners as repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, shall be *saved;* and that such as do not so shall be *damned.* This sure makes a mighty difference betwixt sinners and sinners.

You see what hazard a christian runs by returning again into the sins he has repented of. "Sin no more (saith our Lord), sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." And indeed, one may appeal to any man's conscience, whether he does not find, that the oftener he returns to the sins he has repented of, the more *careless* and *hardened* he grows, and more bold to sin. And if you are not convinced, by what has been said, of the irreparable danger of trusting to a *death-bed repentance,* do but consider what you would think of a man who should preach such a doctrine as this: christians, notwithstanding God has expressly commanded you to John 5. 14.

SERM. XIII.

forsake your sins, and to lead holy lives, as ever you hope for pardon and to escape the damnation of hell; notwithstanding God has declared that this is the utmost mercy to be depended on; yet I will promise you pardon and happiness, if, after an ill-spent life, you are very sorry when you come to die. This is what christians will not bear to hear, and yet it is what is every day depended upon without scruple.

And now, christians, if you have attended to what has been said, you will be able better to judge of your state, whether you are really in the way of salvation or perdition. If you can truly say, that you have forsaken every known sin; that you resist the corruption of your nature; that you immediately repent of any sin which through surprise or frailty you fall into; that you pray for God's grace continually, for light to see, and for power to do your duty, keeping out of the way of temptations as much as possible; if you can truly say, that by this way your heart is changed as well as your outward behaviour, and that you see the fruits of your repentance in the holiness of your life; why then you may, with an humble confidence, speak peace unto your soul.

Till then, religion will be a burthen to you; you will be a burthen to yourselves: you cannot love God; you cannot, *as prodigious a sin as it is*, you cannot but hate Him, because you can expect no good from Him; you can expect nothing but that His judgments will some time or other overtake you for your sins. And this is the reason, that all who live in their sins unrepented of do secretly wish that there were no God to call them to an account; and, from wishing, come at last to believe there is no God.

And now, christians, you see plainly from what has been said, that it is not so much any law or decree of God that shuts sinners out of heaven, but the very condition of their nature makes it impossible for them to be happy; that therefore our nature must be mended before we can hope for any favour from God; we must forsake every thing that we believe will displease Him, and we must accustom ourselves to love and to do what He has commanded.

This is that *repentance*, that *duty*, which has been set before you at this time. And, that you may consider very

seriously of *what has been said,* I will leave these following truths upon your minds. First; that there is no repentance in the grave; that the night is coming on apace *when no man can work;* that the end of sin is not to be seen in this life; that the next life is the life of rewards or punishments; that the more we deny, the more we punish ourselves for our sins, the less punishment, and the more favour, we may expect from God: "If we would judge ourselves (saith St. Paul), we should not be judged"—condemned of the Lord: that by deferring our repentance, we do not only hazard ourselves, but lessen our reward if ever we do repent. And lastly, that if a man, when he comes to die, has not this proof of his repentance, that his life has been such as it should be; namely, *sober, chaste, upright, just, merciful;* he will want one of the greatest comforts of a death-bed—one of the surest marks of a repentance unto life.

[John 9. 4.]

1Cor. 11. 31.

Awaken, O God, the spirit of repentance in this careless world, which stands so much in need of it. Pour down Thy Holy Spirit upon the hearts of all that hear these truths, that they may repent and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, for Jesus Christ's sake. To Whom, &c.

SERMON XIV.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

THE GREAT BLESSING AND THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF A REDEEMER.

The Collect for the Communion Service, in King Edward's Common Prayer, early in the morning.

O God, Who makest us glad with the early remembrance of the birth of Thine only Son Jesus Christ; grant, that as we joyfully receive Him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold Him when He shall come to be our judge, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

LUKE ii. 10.

See Isa. 52. 7; John 3. 16; Rom. 10 15.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

THESE are the words, this the message, of God, by His Angel, to a company of shepherds, the night our Saviour Christ was born. The whole account is as follows: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the Angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

These are the good tidings of great joy, which we are now going to put you in mind of, and to explain to you.

The first thing which, *at this time,* we should consider is, the wonderful goodness of the great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who in compassion to His poor creatures did send—not an Angel, but—His own Son, to redeem us from the sad condition our sins had brought us into. He sent His Son into the world, "that the world through Him might be saved." God grant that every soul here present may, through faith in His blood, make His coming into the world effectual to every one's own salvation; and then it will be matter of joy indeed to all of us, who *now* solemnly remember His incarnation and birth. John 3. 17.

That we may do it with more sincere joy and thankfulness, we will consider the evils and dangers which, as fallen and sinful creatures, we are all subject to.

We are subject to a corrupt heart; to the malice and power of evil spirits; to a proneness in our nature to evil continually; to the temptations of an evil world; to a weakness of nature, which of itself cannot withstand temptations; to a continual fear of death, and of what may be our condition after death; to the thoughts of a judgment to come, and the dread of the sentence then to be passed upon all men.

Now, the thoughts of these evils would make the stoutest heart to tremble, and are enough to distract the wisest man alive, if the God of mercy had not proposed a way to deliver us from this bondage.

This will shew us the blessing of our Saviour's coming into the world, and the infinite mercies we shall receive thereby, if it is not our own fault.

As fallen creatures, we had forfeited all the favours which God designed us at our creation. We then lost that Holy Spirit, by which we had power to know and to do our duty, whatever God expected from us. By the loss of that Holy Spirit, our reason became corrupt, and not sufficient to guide us in the way of truth and salvation; our will and our affections became ungovernable, and we became subject to every temptation to sin; and as such, God, an holy God, could take no pleasure in us.

SERM. XIV.

This shews us the *absolute necessity of a Redeemer*,—of one who could undertake to make satisfaction to the Divine Justice for the sins and offences of a whole world; who was worthy to plead with the great God for His rebellious creatures; who was able to prevail with God to pardon what was past, and to receive them again into favour.

Who does not see the necessity of some one, who might let us know upon what terms God would forgive sinners,—who could put us in a sure way of salvation; of one who could obtain for us that Holy Spirit, which could help us to subdue all our enemies temporal and spiritual; who could set us in his own person an example, how we ought to walk so as to please God, and to deliver us from the wrath to come?

Now, all this our Redeemer, our Lord Christ, has done for us. He has given us the greatest assurance, that God, His Father, will for His sake be reconciled unto us; that He will accept of our repentance; that He will treat us, and deal with us, as He would have done with our first parents, had they not so grievously transgressed His command, provided we will be governed by Him; that is, *He will make us happy for ever*. That in order to this, He will give us His Holy Spirit, to sanctify and to amend our corrupt nature. And, what is the most astonishing mercy, He has prevailed with God to make us everlastingly happy, if, during this short life of trial, we will but strive to fit ourselves for that state of happiness. And, to magnify these blessings, He has assured us, that every soul that shall be born, from the first man that was made to the last that shall come into the world, may have an interest in God's pardon, and in the happiness He proposeth, if he does not lose it by his own fault.

Now, to set this home upon our hearts, and to teach us to rejoice with reason for these blessings, let us turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and consider for whom God has been so wonderfully good and kind.

As for ourselves, we are a race of poor, wretched, sinful creatures, made such by our own fault; who have no merits of our own to move God to have the least pity for us. On the other hand, if we consider His Divine Majesty, He hath millions and millions of creatures better than the best of us, who never offended Him, on whom to bestow His favours.

What then can we think, but that the great God should have overlooked so vile a part of His creation, and left them to themselves? But to send His own Son to bring them back to their duty and happiness! This love, this mercy of God, passeth our understanding, and deserves all the thanks we can possibly render Him.

And the truth is, we could never have believed it, had not His Son laid down His life to assure us of His Father's compassion for His otherwise lost creatures.

This love of God for lost mankind will still appear more wonderful, when we consider, that He made His Son to be subject to the law and punishment due to sinners, and to all the miseries and afflictions which sinners have brought upon themselves. To *poverty;* for He had not where to lay His head. To *contempt;* for He was made the scorn of men. To *pain* and *sorrow,* and to *death* after all, in order to deliver us from eternal death.

In order to this, He took our nature upon Him, that He might be seen by men, and converse with them, and set us an example how we ought to live so as to please God. He appeared indeed in a poor and humble manner, though He was Lord of the world and of all things in it. But this was to teach us to put no more value on the good things of this world than what they deserve; to convince men that the happiness which He has purchased for us is beyond any thing we can enjoy in this life; and that He might set us an example of great humility, of submission to the will of God, and to the condition of life in which His providence shall place us: and lastly, to make us sensible what a sin it will be, to despise the poor, and such as are in a mean condition, since He Himself, by the order of His heavenly Father, was to appear in the world in such a condition of poverty.

It is now time to consider what, in this state of life, Jesus Christ has done for us. He made known to men the only true God, Who alone can make us happy. He shewed us what service and worship was due to Him from men. He came to offer from God the forgiveness of sins to all men upon their true repentance. He came to let us know for certain, that sin unpardoned will be our ruin for ever; that God would have all men to repent, and be saved; that He

SERM. XIV.

will make intercession with His Father for all such as will leave their sins and lead holy lives; that He will deliver all such from the prevailing power of Satan, as go unto God by Him; and from the wrath to come. And finally, He will, if it be not our own faults, restore us to the image of God, in which our first parents were created, and make us partakers of a divine nature in this life, and in the life to come for ever happy.

And now, my christian brethren, let none of us imagine, that God intended that all this love should be lost upon us; or that He expects no other fruits of His own infinite goodness to us, or of His Son's humility and labours to save us, but a bare outward joy and rejoicing.

We do indeed, in our daily prayers, give God thanks in an especial manner for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ: a love, indeed, which passeth all possible expression on our part. But what will this signify, if in the manner of our lives we appear to have no knowledge or sense of the blessing of a Saviour?

What then doth God expect for all this love? Why; that we should love Him, and live like people that do so. That we should obey His commands. That we should honour Him by our holy lives. That we should convince all that see us, that we are christians in deed and in truth, and that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity for the love He has shewn us. That we should seriously resolve, with those men-

chap. 15.

tioned in the Book of Wisdom, that we will not sin, knowing that we are accounted Thy children. That we should not debase ourselves, nor dishonour our blessed Redeemer, by becoming the slaves of sin and Satan, from whom He has redeemed us by His most precious blood. But to shew our gratitude by fruits worthy of so great a mercy; especially in these sad days, wherein the name of Jesus Christ is blasphemed by unbelievers, occasioned chiefly by the bad lives of christians;—but then they are such christians as are sure to be shut out of heaven, for being worse than infidels.

In short; all our hopes of pardon, the acceptance of our persons and our prayers, the grace of God, the conquest of our spiritual enemies, all our hopes of heaven, do all depend upon the Son of God, Whose coming into the world we now celebrate with joy.

Let us only consider to whom these tidings of joy belong. Why, to every penitent sinner; to every one who fears God, and is afraid for himself; to every one who loves God, and desires to do what shall please Him; in short, to every one who is concerned for his own soul, and hopes for salvation through Jesus Christ. To all such as these, the knowledge of Jesus Christ will be good tidings of great joy.

On the other hand, all such as live in their sins unrepented of; such as are unjust, covetous, hard-hearted, revengeful, malicious, drunkards, profane, and the like; these cannot, ought not, to rejoice: and for a very dreadful reason, forasmuch as this same Jesus, we are assured, will come to judge the world in righteousness, and to give to every man according to the works done in the body, whether good or evil.

I would not detain you from the solemn service of this day; but a few words I would leave upon your memory. For example: when christians hear such gracious words as these, *that God sent His Son into the world to save sinners;* that such as receive and believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life; they are too apt to fancy, that they are in no great danger, since Jesus Christ has paid our ransom. Let us have a care of abusing, instead of magnifying, the mercy of God. [John 3. 16, 17.]

Jesus Christ has indeed redeemed us from the wrath to come; but then He must redeem us first from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people zealous of good works.

We may be assured that the case of sinners and their punishment will be unspeakably dreadful, since the only Son of God left the glories of heaven, to lead a poor and humble life on earth, for no other end than to convince sinners that if they were not reconciled unto God, their loss would be great, and their misery beyond expression, and without remedy.

You will observe (and it ought to increase your joy), that our redemption and all the steps leading to it, is matter of mere grace. When God sent His Son into the world, there was nothing in us to move Him to it, but His own infinite goodness, and our infinite misery.

Whatever pretence Adam and his posterity might have to the favour of God before the fall, all was forfeited by his

SERM. XIV.

transgression; and this is the reason, that *the free grace of God* is so much spoken of in the Gospel; that men may not claim any thing to themselves, but to be *humble, thankful,* and *obedient,* to the Lord that bought and redeemed them.

To conclude: The Church has sanctified *this day,* and *this season,* in honour of our blessed Saviour, and of His coming into the world.

Our duty, this day, is to give God our most sincere thanks for His infinite mercy and goodness in sending His Son into the world, to shew us our duty and our danger; how to perform the one, and to avoid the other.

Now, as this ought to be the subject of our thanks and joy at this time, we should not forget that it was our sins which occasioned our blessed Lord's humbling Himself to be born into the world, that we might not be miserable for ever.

This will help to temper our joys, lest, forgetting our danger, we lose our share in the blessings He came to bring us.

Let all such, therefore, as value themselves for being christians, and who hope for any benefit from Christ's coming into the world, resolve, in the first place, sincerely to repent of those sins for which He gave His life and blood; and they will not only have joy in themselves, but will occasion joy in heaven.

And may our gracious God fill all our hearts with sincere thanks, as well as our mouths with praise: then we shall have good reason to rejoice indeed.

Now, unto Him Who had compassion on us when we were under the sentence of death, and sent His only Son to deliver us; blessing, and honour, and glory, and thanksgiving, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XV.

CHRISTMAS.

THE MEANING AND THE EXTENT OF THE SALVATION PURCHASED BY JESUS CHRIST, AND THE DREADFUL CASE OF THOSE WHO DESPISE IT.

1 Tim. i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

That is, there is no truth more certain, no truth more worthy of our knowledge, no truth which so much concerns us to know, or which we may more surely depend on, than this; "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

But however worthy this truth is to be received *of all men*, yet few, God knows, receive it as they ought to do. For how many are there, who because Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, hope for salvation, without taking any care to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ? How many who believe this truth, and yet receive no comfort from it; either suspecting themselves not to be of the number of those whom Christ came to save, or that their sins are too great to be pardoned? And lastly, how very many are there, who, though they are indeed sinners, never think of the danger of being such; and are therefore as careless and unconcerned for what may come hereafter, as if there were nothing to be *feared*, nothing to be *hoped* for?

Now, all these being sad delusions and a great dishonour to christianity, it well becomes the servants of Him, Who came into the world to save sinners, to use their utmost endeavours to remove them; to support the spirits of those who fear where there is no danger; to awaken the consciences

SERM. XV.

of those who are secure and careless in the very midst of danger; and lastly, to reprove the presumption of those who hope for salvation through Jesus Christ without observing His laws.

And these are the things which I beseech you will give attention to with the greatest seriousness. And that I may set these things before you after as plain a manner as possible, we will consider,

First; the meaning and extent of this truth, "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" that we may be able to judge who may, and who may not, hope for salvation through His merits.

Secondly; We shall consider the delusion, and the danger, of those who neglect or despise the salvation purchased for them by Jesus Christ.

I. We will first consider the MEANING, and then the EXTENT, of this truth, *That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Now, a sinner is one, who having broken the laws of God, has reason to fear that God will severely punish him for so doing. He sees very plainly, that he cannot deliver himself from the wrath of an angry God. He is so far from being able to make any satisfaction for the sins he has been guilty of, that he finds in himself a proneness, an inclination to evil, and an aversion, an unwillingness to close with what God has commanded us for our good. This is the condition of a *sinner;* this is the condition of every man by nature. And a sad condition it will appear to be to every one who knows and considers, that the end of sin is not to be seen in this life; but that a day is coming, in which God will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to the works done in the body.

What sinner, what man living, could think of this without despair, if Jesus Christ had not undertaken to deliver us from the just displeasure of God; to make satisfaction for our sins; to restore us to God's favour; and to put us into a way of being happy for ever?

But what has Jesus Christ done to save sinners from this sad condition? Why, He took upon Him the nature of man; He dwelt amongst men; made known to them this com-

fortable truth, that God, *for His sake*, will accept of our repentance; receive us into favour, notwithstanding our past offences; assist us with helps sufficient to do what He expects from us; and will make us eternally happy when we die, if we will suffer ourselves to be governed by His holy laws while we live.

To convince us more effectually of the truth and importance of these things, after He had wrought many wonderful miracles to shew that He came from God, He willingly laid down His life for *our* sake, for *our* sins, for *our* offences; and that God might spare us, and not punish us as we had deserved.

And God, to convince mankind how entirely He was reconciled to them, on account of His Son's death, raised Him from the dead, received Him into heaven, set Him at His own right hand, where He is continually interceding for all those that come unto God by Him, that pray to God for His sake.

And that we may have no doubt in our minds but that all this is done in heaven for us, our Lord sent down the Holy Ghost to supply His place on earth; Who, having appointed an order of men to publish these glad tidings to the whole world, enabled them to work miracles; to speak languages which before they were ignorant of; to heal the sick with a word of their mouth; to raise the dead; in one word, to do such things as none but such as were sent by God could do.

And lastly, these having fulfilled their ministry, before they laid down their lives for the truths they had preached, they (as Jesus Christ had commanded them) ordained others to supply their places, to preach these truths, to offer these terms of mercy to all succeeding generations, with whom He promised His presence and blessing unto the world's end.

To these He has given power to receive all that are willing into His family, which is His Church; to reconcile such as fall, and return from their evil ways; and to represent unto God the satisfaction which His Son has made in *our* nature for *our* sins.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for us. He has recon-

SERM. XV.

ciled us to God; He has put us into a way of salvation; He has given us all necessary assistance, to support our weakness, to resist our enemies, to renew our nature, and to make us fit for heaven and happiness.

But have all men a right to this salvation purchased by Jesus Christ? This we shall see now we come to consider the EXTENT of these words, "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

And truly, the Scriptures are in nothing more plain than
John 3. 17. in this truth, "That God so loved the world, that He sent His Son, that the world through Him might be saved."

That God had no respect of persons in thus loving the
1 Tim. 2. 4. world, *His will being this*, THAT ALL MEN SHOULD BE SAVED; that even such as perish, through their own wilful disobedience, are of the number of those whom Jesus Christ came
[2 Pet. 2. 1.] to save. They denied, saith St. Peter, the Lord that bought them; that bought and would have saved them, but that they brought upon themselves destruction.

Nay, to take away all manner of scruple, and to apply this comfortable truth to the minds of afflicted penitents,
Rom. 5. St. Paul speaks of this after a most convincing manner. As the sin of Adam (saith he) affected all his posterity; as by one offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation; so the merits of Christ were designed to redeem all the posterity of Adam; forasmuch as by the righteousness of One, that is, Jesus Christ, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

As sure then as I am one of those, who by Adam's transgression am become corrupt and a *sinner* before God, so sure am I redeemed by Jesus Christ. This every christian man may say to himself.

This was the very doctrine of Christ Himself, and this He taught by His own example, when He prayed for the very persons who crucified Him, who had an interest in the very death they made Him to suffer; otherwise He would not have prayed that God would forgive them.

And the Church of Christ still continues to intercede with God for all mankind, holding this truth, that the love of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, extend to the whole race of men. By this practice, endeavouring to bring the

hearts of believers to that godlike temper of charity and good-will for all that bear the image of God; and, by this practice, supporting the spirits of dejected penitents, who will have no reason to despair, since the greatest sinners are in a capacity of being saved.

We are obliged to say, *in a capacity of salvation;* for the truth is, all are not saved that Christ came to save. Salvation is indeed offered to all, to whom the Gospel is or has been preached; but all are not disposed to receive it, especially on the terms on which it is offered.

Many are not sensible of the danger they are in; others will not forsake their sins for any consideration whatever; and even too, too many despise the very offers of a Redeemer, of pardon and grace through Him.

In all these cases, the Saviour of the world assures us, that it is their own fault, purely their own fault, if they are not saved. "Ye will not come unto Me (saith He) that ye might have life." John 5. 40.

If people, when salvation is offered them, will notwithstanding unworthily slight the mercy; if men to whom God has made Himself known, will not retain God in their knowledge; if those that have been enlightened, and have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; if they are again entangled therein, and are finally lost; this is not for want of means to save them, but they *will not* be saved: they will not attend to the word preached unto them; they will not believe the terrors of the world to come; they will not submit to the terms of salvation. This being their case, their destruction is from themselves.

II. And this brings us to consider, *how very dreadful the case is of those who deny the Lord that bought them, or neglect the offers of salvation made by Him to all sinners.*

And indeed, when we consider what Jesus Christ has done, in order to redeem and save us, we shall have the greatest reason to believe, that the punishment of those who are not saved by Him will be unspeakably great. For can we imagine that Christ, the Son of God, would have left the glories of heaven, and would have lived a miserable life on earth, and died a more miserable death, but that He knew, that if sin-

SERM. XV.

ners were not reconciled to God, but died in their sins, their punishment would be terrible, and their condition miserable, and without remedy.

So that the greatness of the mercy may convince us of the greatness of the punishment of those that despise the salvation offered them. The Spirit of God, from Whom only we can know what becomes of men after death, assures us, that such shall be shut out of heaven, and have their portion in a place where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

And whatever may become of those who have never had the Gospel preached unto them, they who have had salvation offered to them, and mind it not, must not expect to escape a severe judgment.

And, lest we should think ourselves safe, because we have embraced the Gospel, let us always remember, that the Gospel requires Faith and Repentance of all that expect any benefit by it. We must not only say, we believe the Gospel, but we must live like men that do so; like men that are in the midst of enemies, with fear and care, lest we should miscarry; like those that have escaped eternal misery, with thankful hearts; and like those who hope to go to heaven, where no impure thing can enter.

But if, instead of doing so, we lead a careless or a wicked life: if we neglect the means of grace, the ordinances of God, and turn our backs upon the Word and Sacraments; if we confess we are sinners, and yet take no care to amend our ways; if we are taken up with the business or pleasures of this life, so as to forget that there is another to come; why then, in truth, we are not of the number of those who shall be saved; neither will it be any blessing to such, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And now, good christians, you see what a merciful regard God has had for His poor creatures in this dispensation. The most ignorant may know what God expects from them. The greatest sinner may be sure of pardon, if he repents, and brings forth fruit answerable to amendment of life. The weakest christian may depend upon all necessary assistance. The meanest servant of Christ may be sure not to be overlooked. Lastly, every christian may be confident, that his

labour will not be in vain, but that he may be for ever happy, if it is not altogether his own fault.

These are certain truths, and worthy of all men to be received. How comes it then to pass, that we so often hear these truths without being affected by them? Why, the truth is, we are not well convinced of the danger a sinner is in, without the help of a Redeemer.

If one talks to a sick man about the cause of his illness, and gives him good hopes that his distemper is curable, you need not use many words to persuade him to hear you, because his life is at stake; but if you tell a man that thinks himself well, of a remedy, it is a thousand to one but he forgets it. This is our case—the case of the generality of christians. We, in obedience to our Lord's command, preach faith, and repentance, and obedience; we publish in His name a free pardon to all who are willing to comply with the terms of salvation. They that lay things to heart, that know they are sinners, and the danger of being such; these gladly *hear*, and *receive*, and *remember*, and *obey*, the terms of salvation; whilst others are as unconcerned as if they had nothing to fear.

From whence you see, christians, that your faith and salvation depend very much upon that disposition with which you hear the Gospel. If you are serious and concerned in good earnest for your salvation, it will be no hard matter to persuade you to look upon the Gospel as the greatest blessing. But without these dispositions, the Gospel will be a burthen to you; Jesus Christ Himself no blessing; nor heaven worth caring for.

You see who they are, who ought to rejoice upon every return of this festival; who ought to take comfort; by whom this truth is worthy to be received; even by all such as are sincere, such as resolve to serve and to please God to the best of their power. Such may be sure of pardon and acceptance, though they have been never so great sinners. All such may and will receive the terms of pardon, and him who has obtained them, with open arms, and with a glad heart; admiring the great goodness of God; adoring the love of their Redeemer; resolving to live worthy of such mighty favours. And these passions will make us all cheerful, with-

SERM. XV.

out being foolishly vain; serious, without being sad and cast down; as sober as christians, though our hearts are full of joy.

Now, unto Him Who had mercy upon us when we were in darkness and under the power of Satan; Who took our nature upon Him, was born an infant, became subject to the law made for sinners, offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and raised up sinful men to the honour of being the children of God: to Him be all honour, and glory, and blessing, and thanksgiving, and power, ascribed by us and by all His faithful servants, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XVI.

THE DISPOSITION NECESSARY TO MAKE JESUS CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL THE GREATEST OF ALL BLESSINGS.

MALACHI iv. 2.

Unto you that fear My name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings. See Luke 4. 18.

I MAKE choice of these words, from amongst many other texts of Sacred Scripture declaring the same thing, to shew you,—*What dispositions are necessary to make Jesus Christ and His Gospel appear to be, what they really are, the greatest blessings that God ever bestowed upon mankind.*

It is true, all christians are ready to own this, and pretend to rejoice, and to be thankful, for so great blessings; when, after all, it is *utterly impossible*, that any man should from his heart *be glad*, when he does not *feel* his *own misery*; who does not truly apprehend the misery of mankind, *without the blessing of a Redeemer*.

It was for this reason, that the Spirit of God, *before Jesus Christ took our nature upon Him*, expressly foretold, who they were to whom the Messiah should preach; who *would*, and who would *not*, receive Him and His doctrine.

For instance, it is said that God anointed the Messiah "to preach good tidings to the meek," for they only would receive His message; "to bind up the broken hearted," for such only would be glad of His help; "to proclaim liberty to the captives," for they only who were sensible of their bondage would be glad to be set at liberty. Accordingly, when our blessed Saviour came amongst men, He invited such only to be His hearers, to whom He knew His doctrine would be acceptable: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And when He was blamed for conversing too freely with publicans and

Isa. 61. 1.

Matt. 11. 28

SERM. XVI.

sinners, He silenced His adversaries with this reason and answer: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Luke 5. 31, 32.

Why, are not all men, without exception, sinners? Yes. But that which is intimated in these words is this: that there are sinners who are not at all sensible of their *bad condition;* and their condition is the more deplorable for that: while such as are truly sensible of their own ailments are very thankful for help, and readily comply with the advice of such as can help them. And therefore, when a certain publican, to testify the *sincerity of His repentance,* resolved to part with his estate rather than not do every body *right* that he had before *wronged,* Jesus Christ assures him, that his having been a greater sinner than ordinary will be no hindrance to his salvation: "For the Son of Man (saith He) is come to seek and to save that which is lost;" that is, such as out of a sense of their misery apply to *Him* for health and salvation.

Luke 19. 10.

In short, wherever the Gospel was preached, whether to Jews or Gentiles, "as many as were ordained to (that is, disposed for) eternal life, believed." As many as *feared God,* and were *in fear* for themselves, and trembled to hear of a judgment to come, all such *believed,* became christians in good earnest, and thought it a great blessing that they could be delivered from their fears upon the conditions the Gospel proposed.

Acts 13. 48.

By this time you perceive the meaning of the text, which I have brought all these Scriptures to explain: "Unto you that fear My name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." That is; to all that truly fear God, and are sensible how much they have provoked Him by their sins; to such, Jesus Christ, and His Gospel, will both be welcome, and a blessing; whilst *all the proud,* (as it is in the verse going before the text,) such *as do wickedly,* fearing no evil, shall be *burnt as stubble.*

So that the plain meaning and design of all these Scriptures is, to shew how men must be disposed to receive Jesus Christ, and His Gospel, to any saving purposes. For it is but too sure, that there are an infinite number of people, to

whom Jesus Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness*, is preached, who notwithstanding continue in *darkness;* and though He comes *with healing in His wings*, yet they *perish* for want of being disposed *to be saved.* "To you that fear God, (saith the Prophet,) He will arise with healing in His wings." "Whosoever among you feareth God, (say the Apostles,) to you is the word of this salvation sent." *The fear of God, therefore, is the foundation of saving faith.* Acts 13. 26.

People may profess christianity, and be no gainers by it in the end; they may be called christians, before they know the duties or the blessings of the Gospel; and if they have not the *fear of God* in their hearts, they may live in an outward, formal profession of the christian religion all their days, and die in a condition not better than that of infidels.

Therefore, it behoves us all, as we value our souls, seriously to consider, and to know,

First; What that fear of God is, and how it is wrought in us, which is so necessary a condition and foundation of saving faith?

Secondly; We shall see, that we have just cause to be afraid, and that the more we know, the more we shall abhor ourselves.

Lastly; That the more we know and abhor ourselves, the sooner will God receive us into favour, and the more cautious we shall ever after be of losing His favour.

And these shall be the particulars, which, by God's help, I shall now explain to you.

I. We will first consider *what this fear of God is*, and how it is wrought in us, *which is the condition and foundation of saving faith.*

And first, we must be careful not to mistake the *fear of man* for the *fear of God.* Human laws, fear of shame, of reproach, and many other worldly considerations, may restrain a man from crimes that other people are guilty of; and yet, such a man may be an utter stranger to the fear of God. Whereas such as truly *fear God* are not led thereto by any earthly consideration whatever; but they have seriously considered their own great corruption, and God's infinite purity; their own sad deserts, and God's severe justice; they cannot but acknowledge the justice and holiness of His laws; and

SERM. XVI.

yet they find in themselves an unwillingness to obey them. They are sure that without God's grace they cannot do any thing that is good; and yet they find in themselves a strange backwardness even to ask that favour and assistance. They know, that they live upon His bounty, and yet they cannot find in their hearts to be thankful. These are both instances of great disorder, and must needs make them liable to God's displeasure. They profess to believe "that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;" and yet they are apt to sin as presumptuously as if they were indeed hid from His sight. They hear how severely He threatens those that transgress His laws. They have seen His judgments upon other sinners, and they know not how soon it may be their own case.

[Prov. 15. 3.]

All these are *real occasions* of fear; and this fear is greatly increased, when they consider how unable they are to help themselves. They cannot *fly* from His presence; they dare not stand upon their *innocency;* they see that *sorrow* and *tears,* and *asking forgiveness,* will not prevail with an earthly judge to pardon criminals, when their crimes are only against men like themselves; and why should they suppose that God will not avenge the presumptuous breach of His own laws, and affronts against His Divine Majesty?

And not only their fears are increased by these considerations, but their *sorrows,* likewise, by considering the *happiness of heaven,* which they were made capable of enjoying; and knowing at the same time, how unworthy they have made themselves of such mighty favours.

Now people that are under such convictions of guilt, under such fears, under such concern for their everlasting welfare (as all people must be who lay things to heart); such people will be glad to hear, that God will forgive them upon any terms; they will thankfully own His great goodness, and resolve to comply with what *He* is pleased to appoint, in order to their restoration to favour; they will be afraid of losing His favour again, by any wilful neglect of their duty; and, when through frailty they have done amiss, they will most heartily bewail their misfortune and faults: and by such *dispositions* as these, they become fit objects of God's mercy in Jesus Christ. For it was to people *thus affected* and *thus*

disposed, that Jesus Christ spoke, when He said, "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." [Matt. 11 28.] And indeed it is purely for want of such dispositions as these, that the Gospel is preached without effect; that Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in Him, is offered *even to us Gentiles*, who before were in darkness, and in the shadow of death; and we scarce esteem it a favour, because we are not sensible of the sad estate we are in without *the blessing of a Redeemer*.

For as a man, who feels his disorder, and knows that he is in danger without the help of a physician, cannot possibly be easy till he has done what he can to save himself from death, and will be truly thankful when help is offered him; so surely should *we* be, did we but well understand the danger we are in.

And if people can be always easy, and can pass their days without fear and concern for what may come hereafter, it is a most sure sign they neither know themselves, nor know *what is to be hereafter*.

This then is the spring of all our misery: we are in danger, and do not know it; we are sick, and do not perceive it; we are in the way of ruin, and yet fear no evil. And while it is *thus* with us, no wonder that Jesus Christ and His Gospel are *preached*, and *recommended*, and *pressed* upon us, without any visible effect upon our *faith* or *lives*.

How necessary, then, must a discourse be which *will shew us to ourselves?* It may be uneasy to flesh and blood to have our weakness and miseries laid open; but it is a most necessary work; our health and welfare depend upon it. I shall, therefore, in the next place shew,

II. *That we are far from being safe; that we have indeed cause to be afraid; and the more we know, the more we shall abhor ourselves.*

That man was created in the image of God, that is, *in righteousness and true holiness;* that he has lost *that image*, by his *infidelity* and *disobedience;* that all men, from that day to this, are extremely corrupt before God, having *their understanding darkened; their heart full of all uncleanness;* all their members prepared for wickedness, whenever a temptation comes in the way; that being *children of disobedience*, Eph. 4. 24. Eph. 4. 18. Mark 7. 21. Rom. 3. 13. Eph. 2. 2.

SERM. XVI.

they are, in a great measure, governed by the spirits and powers of darkness; out of whose power it is impossible ever to recover ourselves, by any thing we can do, without the grace of God.

These are truths which the Spirit of God has made known to us, that we may know what we are, and what we must expect, if we die in this condition; and that, if the image of God is not renewed in us during our continuance here on earth, we shall have our portion, *for ever*, with those spirits which kept *not their first estate*, who are therefore "reserved in everlasting chains, unto the judgment of the great day."

[Jude ver. 6; 2 Pet. 2. 4.]

This God has been pleased to make known to us, in order to *awaken* us, that we may consider, and see, and feel, the disorders we labour under, and what it will end in, if we are not careful of ourselves.

But you will say, all people are not thus perverse and wicked, and in this wretched and sad condition. No: thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, all men are not actually so; but then it is owing to the *fear of God*, by which they have been converted, by which they have been *taken out of the snare of the devil*, who otherwise *would have led them captive at his will*. For, that all men are by nature enemies to God and goodness, and would all be equally wicked and miserable, if not some way or other restrained, is plain from our very children, whom we are obliged to chastise and punish, even as soon as they are able to do any thing, to keep them from doing mischief, which, if let alone, would end in their destruction. The seeds of all manner of wickedness are in them, and these would all appear and grow up, if we did not weed them out, and root them up by a careful discipline.

[2 Tim. 2. 26.]

And this, God knows, is but too often, by experience, made manifest; where children have been left to themselves, and the seeds of all manner of villainy, which were naturally in them, have been suffered to grow to perfection. The very first thing that appears in them is, an aversion to every thing that is good. No sooner can they speak plain, but they are apt to lie. The first use of their reason generally appears in cunning, and tricks that do not bespeak a simplicity which one could wish in them. From these faults, they follow their inclinations to greater, till at last they commit all iniquity

with greediness, and bring upon themselves destruction both of soul and body.

And, I beseech you, consider, that this is not the case of *this* or *that* wicked person; for we are all of the same *make* and *frame* of spirit; we have all the same seeds of corruption within us, and it is the grace of God, that any one man is better than another.

Whoever looks into the world, or into his own heart, must own this; he must see that nature is *strangely corrupt*, when people must be forced by laws and punishments to *do* what all men own is *fit to be done;* when the duties of religion are looked upon as a *burthen;* when men can pray with indifference for the pardon of their sins, for the favour of God, and for an happy life after death; when we know what we ought to do, and own that it is reasonable, and yet must struggle hard with ourselves, before we can consent to do what we inwardly approve of.

All these are sure signs of *a bad condition;* and it is necessary that we should *know this*, and be often put in mind of the danger we are in, that being convinced how miserable our condition is, we may give no rest to ourselves, till, by the grace of God, we have found out a way to escape.

And this brings us to the last part of our discourse:

III. *That the more sensible we are of our own unworthiness, the more we abhor ourselves, the sooner will God receive us into favour, and the more cautious we shall ever after be of losing His favour.* "Surely (saith the Psalmist), His salvation is nigh them that fear Him." Ps. 85. 9.

It has been always observed by those that take notice of God's providences, that God, for the most part, *then* interposes, when things are come to extremity, and when men have no hopes of help from any thing they themselves can do.

It was just thus, when our blessed Saviour took our nature upon Him, and manifested Himself to the world. The Jews knew by the *Law* what sin was, and what it deserved. The rest of the world knew, by what their own consciences suggested, that sin stuck close to them; and those that were serious feared what might follow. And this perplexity of mind, in which the Gospel found men, made it very acceptable, and more readily to be embraced; and they received

SERM. XVI.

with thankfulness a dispensation so full of goodness, which *assured* them of *pardon* upon their repentance; of *grace* to renew their nature; and of *eternal happiness* after this life, to all such as should endeavour to purify themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

Indeed, there were people then (as there are now many) who were under no apprehensions of danger; who lived at all adventures, and feared no evil, or who had an high opinion of their own goodness; and these, as the Scriptures inform us, "rejected the counsel of God," and His offers of mercy.

And is not the case the same at this day? Are not people in as much danger now? Have not they the very tokens of sin and damnation upon them? And yet are as easy as if they were to be saved without any concern of their own. Pray hear what God declares by His prophet: "To this man will I look" [that is, in mercy], "even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and trembleth at My word."

Isa. 66. 2.

And why are these dispositions necessary to obtain the favour of God in Jesus Christ? The reasons are plain. *First;* that men, reflecting upon the misery of their condition, may truly value the favour of their deliverance. *Secondly;* that the power of God may appear in the conversion of sinners, who had no power to help themselves. *Thirdly;* that those who have felt the burthen of a troubled conscience, and have been once truly afraid of the wrath of God, may ever after walk more circumspectly. And *lastly;* that being truly sensible of the danger they have escaped, the duties of religion, which are otherwise uneasy to flesh and blood, may be more cheerfully embraced.

And now, you see how necessary it is, that we should be convinced of the misery of our condition, and of our own inability to help ourselves, before we can even be disposed to look upon the Gospel as a real blessing, much less receive it with that joy and thankfulness which so great a favour requires. You see how people come to differ; some *believing,* and others *slighting, the very same truths.* The plain account of which is, that some fear God, and are afraid for themselves, and are concerned for what may come hereafter; while others live at all adventures, and fear no evil, nor are they concerned to prevent it.

Hence it appears, that it is not always for want of reasons that men do not believe, but very often from an unwillingness to *receive the truth.* Therefore Jesus Christ is said to be a *stumbling-block,* because men of wicked lives and principles could not receive His doctrine. "Hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand," because of their *obstinacy, pride, worldly-mindedness,* &c. Now, this the Scripture assures us, was *their condemnation;* which could not have been, unless the will of God had been sufficiently made known to them, so as that a well-disposed person might have easily perceived it. [1Cor.1.23.] [Isa. 6. 9.] John 3. 19.

And the conclusion of all will be, that nothing in nature is so proper to beget a true faith in Jesus Christ as a true and lively sense of our condition, a feeling and an assurance that things are most wretchedly amiss with us. For when we are once indeed convinced that our sins make us altogether unworthy of God's favour; that our weakness, without His grace, will expose us to all manner of wickedness; that our sins make us liable to a severe account, which, unless His mercy interposes, will sink us into everlasting ruin; why then Jesus Christ will be thought a blessing, because *He* only can cure us of these fears; *He* only can help our infirmities; *He* only can teach and enable us to please God while we live, and make death a blessing to us when we die.

In one word; *He* only can cure all our fears, except such as are necessary to keep us awake, and ease all our burdens.

After all, I beseech you, do not imagine that the only end of Christ's coming into the world was to ease us of our fears. For, assuredly, one great end of His taking our nature upon Him was, to free the world from wickedness, and that blindness and gross ignorance which occasioned it. "For this purpose," saith St. John, "was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3. 8.

Whoever are not disposed to let the Gospel have *this effect* upon them, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," will have no reason to rejoice that the Gospel is preached unto them; which contains threatenings, and much severer punishments, than ever the law of nature could suggest, or the law of Moses made mention of. *Weeping,* and *wailing,* and *gnashing of teeth,* for ever [Acts 26. 18.] [Matt. 13. 42; 25. 30.

SERM. XVI.

and ever, are punishments not to be spoken of, not to be thought of, without fear and trembling.

God Almighty fill all our hearts with such an holy fear of His judgments, that we may look upon the Gospel as a blessing, since by it we are shewn a way to escape, and enabled to work out our own salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

To Whom, &c. be glory both now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XVII.

THE DUTY OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL, AND THE UNHAPPY STATE OF THOSE WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

O God, terrible in judgment, how ought I to tremble, when I undertake to persuade others to fear Thy displeasure, when the knowledge of Thy Word and judgments have had so little effect upon myself. Pardon, O merciful God, this sinful security in myself, and all that preach Thy Word, and in all that shall hear us; and enable us so effectually to persuade others, both by our life and sermons, that it is an evil thing and bitter to be under Thy displeasure; that seeing our danger, and feeling our misery, and the disease we labour under, we may thankfully embrace the means which Thy goodness has provided for our recovery, and joyfully close with that gracious invitation of Thy blessed Son—"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Grant this, for His sake, O Blessed God. Amen.

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2 Cor. v. 11.

Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

See Isa. 61. 1; 66. 2; Ps. 34. 18; 90. 11; 119. 120; Matt. 11. 28; Luke 12. 5; Phil. 2. 12; James 2. 19

There never, sure, was a time more necessary to set the terrors of the Lord before men *than this*, when the generality of those who call themselves christians either do not know, or have forgotten, for what end they came into the world; how they ought to live in it; or what is like to become of them when they go out of it.

Now as the necessity of persuading people to be more concerned for themselves is very great, so are the reasons made use of by the Spirit of God the most *terrible* and the most *awakening*. What are they? We find them in the verse before the text, and they are these: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body," that is, in this life, "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

SERM. XVII.

John 5. 29. Which the Son of God, Who is to be the judge of the world, explains in these very words, "All that are in the graves shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*

You see, christians, who those are that are supposed in an especial manner to know this terror of the Lord. They are the ministers of Jesus Christ. You hear also whence they have this knowledge of God's purpose, to call all men to an account, even from the Son of God Himself, Who came down from heaven to make this known unto men, in order to save them from ruining themselves.

I pray you, therefore, take notice, brethren, that the words we make use of to *awaken*, to *persuade*, and to *convince* you, are not the arguments of sinful men like yourselves; for they are the arguments of God Himself, the God of truth and mercy, Who would have all men to know, and savingly to believe these truths, that they may be happy for ever, and that they may escape eternal misery.

Our duty, as ministers of Jesus Christ, in the first place, is, ourselves to be thoroughly convinced of the great importance of these dreadful truths, that we may be better able and disposed to convince and persuade others, what an evil thing and bitter it is to forsake the Lord, and forget these important truths; that we and you must all give an account to God; that we shall be judged according to our works; and that this is the only time in which we are to provide for that great account.

And, indeed, if these truths will not persuade both us and you to consider what we have to do, and to live like people who hope to be able to give a comfortable account of themselves, we shall be ruined, as sure as these are the words of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

To oblige *us* to do *our* duty faithfully, the Spirit of God makes use of this as the strongest reason and argument:

Heb. 13. 17. "They (that is, the ministers of Christ) do watch for your souls, as they that must give an account." A consideration so very terrible, that it is enough to make the best of God's ministers to tremble, as often as they consider what

they have undertaken, and the account, the great account, they have to give, not only for themselves and their own actions, but because they stand charged and are accountable for others.

And, O! that God would communicate to us all such a degree of *concern*, of *grace*, and *zeal*, as is necessary for the work we have undertaken, and the account we have to give!

We should then never cease to put you in mind of the account which *you*, as well as *we*, have to give, when we are to leave this world; and the dreadful hazard they all run, who defer their repentance, and who are not careful to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and answerable to amendment of life.

Let me therefore beg of you all (who understand me), to consider the following truths, which I am going to lay before you; that being by them awakened out of that deadly sleep and indifference into which Satan has cast the unthinking world, we may look about us, and see where it will end at the last. *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* To what would we persuade them? Why, first of all, to give credit to the God that made them, Who has made Himself, and His will and purposes, known unto men, by His Spirit, by His Word, and by His only Son.

For instance; He has represented Himself as a God *merciful, long-suffering, plenteous in goodness*, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. On the other hand, He has declared, that such as obey not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, such as neglect or despise His goodness, His will and commands, and the means of grace and salvation which He has appointed; He has declared, that all such shall find Him *a God terrible in judgment.*

Sure, nobody expects that the ministers of Christ should go about to prove these things: *that we must all appear* [2Cor.5.10.] *before the judgment-seat of Christ;* that every man shall then receive according to what he has done in this life, whether it has been good or evil; that the wicked shall then be sent into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. There can be no greater proof *than that* the Son of God *has declared this.*

SERM. XVII.

What then have the ministers of Christ to do? Why, to endeavour to persuade men, by that love which every man ought to have for his own soul, to think how he will be able to answer, in the first place, for the crime of not believing the Son of God, Whom God sent into the world to make His will known unto men. This (believe it, christians) will be found to be no small crime; HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT SHALL BE DAMNED. These are not *our* words, but the very words of the Son of God.

Mark 16.16.

You will say, perhaps, all christians do believe the Gospel. Would to God we all did believe as we ought to do! But, to *believe* is not enough to justify us before God, unless our faith obliges us to live as becomes christians.

To love, to fear, and to glorify God; to be *sober, chaste,* and *temperate;* to be *just* and *charitable* to men; and after all, *which is the perfection of saving faith,* to confess before God, that when we have done all these things, it is all owing to the mere mercy of God, to His grace, His assistance, and to the merits of Jesus Christ and *His* intercession, that God will accept and reward our faith, and our poor endeavours to please Him. This is the case and consequence of a *true and saving faith.*

I will set before you the fruits of an *unprofitable faith*— the faith of too many pretended christians, who know the Gospel, but live as if not one word of it were true; who make light of sins of the most damning nature; who will not be persuaded to fear the wrath of God, till they shall feel it to their everlasting sorrow.

Now, to awaken and terrify such unhappy sinners as hold the truth in unrighteousness, the Lord Jesus Himself hath given us the very sentence that shall be passed upon such, when He shall come to judge the world in justice; "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." A sentence so frightful, that no one can hardly repeat it without trembling, who ever would but say to himself, what if this should be the sentence to be passed upon myself!

[Matt. 25. 41.]

Now, this is the sentence which shall most surely be passed upon every sin unrepented of; such as, *injustice, fraud, oppression,* and *covetousness,* which is the root of these and many other evils. This will be the cursed end of all

unlawful pleasures, of *adultery*, *fornication*, and *drunkenness*, which too often leads to these. This will be the reward of living in malice, envy, and hatred. This is what will be got, by all unlawful ways of getting estates, of cunning and cheating bargains. This will be the end of dishonouring God, His *name*, His *Word*, and *sacraments*. In short, this will be the dreadful punishment of *hypocrisy*, of pretending to be christians without christianity.

These truths being as sure as the God who hath declared them, what is it which makes so many go on in a careless way of living, as if there were no truth in them? Why, either they do not know what a dreadful thing it is to be a sinner, and under the displeasure of God, or what will certainly be the punishment of sin unrepented of; or they resolve to repent before they die; or they depend upon the mercy of God, and hope He will not be so severe as He has threatened; or that they shall fare no worse than other people; or, lastly, that it is in vain to hope for pardon, their sins have been so great, and so long continued in. All these, God knows, are sad delusions.

Sin is not so light a matter as christians are apt to think. It was the occasion of the loss of Paradise to our first parents; it was what provoked the justice of God to drown a wicked world; and, after that, to destroy a number of cities by fire from heaven.

And, to shew His hatred of sin, and to make men dread it, He has made known to us, that He spared not a race of creatures higher than the highest on earth, but cast those very angels that sinned into hell, where He has declared, that all such as follow them in their rebellion shall with them be doomed to their punishment.

These frightful truths are recorded in Scripture, to awaken us; to make men afraid of sin, and of ruining themselves by it; and are proper to shake the *most careless*, the *proudest*, the *stubbornest* sinner, who is not given over to a reprobate mind.

And I have repeated them, to put you and myself in mind, to consider what we have to do; not to make light of sin, which cost Jesus Christ His life and blood; and that any who have been so unhappy as hitherto to have lived in sin,

SERM. XVII.

in any known sin, may see what it will certainly end in, if not forsaken and repented of. As also, to put every one of us upon thinking what is like to be our case a few years hence, when with respect to us the world will be at an end, [John 9. 4.] and "when the night will come when no man can work." And lastly, when we must give an account to God, how we lived in this state of trial; what good, and what evil, we have done; when Satan will be ready to accuse us; when our own conscience will tell us what he saith is true; when we cannot say with truth that we had made our peace with God before we left this world; and when we shall have nothing to say, but to stand speechless, expecting a sentence which is dreadful even to be repeated.

When this shall be the case, *as most surely it will*, of every one who lives and dies in sin; it will then be too late to wish that they had hearkened to the ministers of God, when they would have persuaded them to consider, before it was too late, the anguish of a soul that shall find itself shut out of heaven, and sentenced to a misery that shall last for ever.

I know that every one who hears this will be apt to say to himself, *God forbid that this should ever be my case!* and to be sure every christian will say *Amen*. But then, whoever hopes that this may not be his own case, must suffer himself to be persuaded, and to believe, that his future and everlasting state of happiness or misery will certainly be according to his faith in God, and the manner of the life he leads in this world, where we all have our time and state of trial.

And now, my christian brethren, I take it for granted, that so many as have heard these truths with seriousness will be touched with some degree and sense of the danger they may possibly be liable too. And such a concern may, through the grace of God, lead them to enquire, whether they have been christians in name only, and not in deed and in truth; or, to speak plainly, whether they are in the way of *salvation* or *damnation*.

These are *two words* of the greatest concern to every man who is in his right mind. For (and a sad truth it is) very many there are who are not so, *who are given over to a reprobate mind*, to a mind void of judgment; who, having hardened themselves in sin, so as to be *past feeling*, as the

Apostle speaks, are not terrified with words of the greatest dread and thoughtfulness to such whose conscience is awake, who are afraid for themselves, and for the account they must one day give to God, the searcher of hearts. Eph. 4. 19.

Where now shall a person who labours under these fears, where shall he seek for help? where may he hope to find comfort? who shall deliver such a wretched man from a condition worse than death? St. Paul has answered this question. It is *the grace, the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,* which alone can deliver us from this bondage. To Him God the Father has committed the care of the souls of men; He has paid the price of their redemption by His most precious blood. And, to convince sinners how much He pities the sad condition and danger they have brought themselves into, He hath made this following most kind and merciful invitation to every son and daughter of Adam: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." [Rom. 7. 24, 25.] Matt. 11. 28.

Here is, christians, as gracious an invitation as ever was made to man. All that are in pain and fear, on account of their former sins; all that are sensible of their former defects and backslidings; all that are sensible that of themselves they want power to overcome the corruption of their nature; all that sincerely desire to please God, and to avoid every thing that may displease Him; in short, *all, all without exception,* even the greatest sinners, are invited, with a sure promise of a remedy for all the evils they *feel* or *fear.* For no less a physician, no less a person than the Son of God, inviteth, and hath promised to relieve and help them.

But, O Jesus! how few are there, when we look into the world, how few are there, who are sensible that they want Thy help! How few who apply to Thee for help, as they ought to do!

We do not speak of those who live without God in the world; who despise the Gospel of Christ, and the salvation offered in it; who make a mock of sin and of hell; for these are plainly given over to a mind void of judgment: and it is no wonder, that this merciful invitation of Jesus Christ doth not affect them,—nobody expects it from them.

But what shall we say, when the generality of christians,

SERM. XVII.

such as pretend to hope for salvation, do not appear to be much concerned in this gracious invitation? So few being convinced that they stand in need of a *Redeemer*, of *pardon*, of *help* to do their duty, of *grace* to please God; infinite, therefore, are the number, even of the professors of christianity, who seem not to be much concerned in this invitation of the only Saviour of the world.

The reason is this: None are concerned to look out for help, but such as are sensible they want help: "They that are whole (saith our Lord) need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I came not (saith He) to call the righteous," such as think themselves safe, "but sinners, to repentance."

[Luke 5. 31, 32.]

And indeed it is with the diseases of our souls, as it is with those of our bodies. If we feel little or no pain, we are not much concerned; and yet a dead palsy, or a lethargy, are as mortal as a wound that makes us feel smart, and gives us pain. Thus it is with regard to the diseases of the soul. And it is certainly one of the heaviest of God's judgments for a man not to be afraid for himself.

It concerns, therefore, every man to know what reason he has to be afraid for himself, and to know that he stands in need of help. This was the case of the church of Laodicea; "Thou sayest that thou art rich, and wantest nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This is a *sad case*, and yet it is the case (God knows) of too many christians, as appears plainly by that great unconcernedness to be seen in the lives of christians; who generally satisfy themselves, and place their hopes of safety and happiness, in being free from scandalous sins, such as the magistrate would punish; in observing the outward duties of christianity, such as the most unconverted person may perform, without being sensible of the bondage of sin, and that their religion must mend their corrupt nature before they die, or they must never expect to be saved.

Rev. 3. 17.

It was in order to awaken such as would attend, and to prevent such delusions, that you were, in the first part of this discourse, put in mind of the account we must all give, how we have spent our lives here, and of the happiness or misery that *will* certainly follow such an account.

And this was done, in order to persuade you, every man for himself, to endeavour to work out his salvation with fear and trembling; that is, with a concern of one whose soul is at stake; that you may be prepared to hearken to the invitation of Jesus Christ to make you happy.

"To this man (saith God) will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." Isa. 66. 2. A true sense and confession of our misery will, you see, move the pity of God; a deep sense of our own weakness, and inability to help ourselves, will engage His power to assist us; and a sense of our own unworthiness will move His compassion.

Whoever, therefore, among you feareth God, to you is this invitation of Jesus Christ made; "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." [Matt. 11. 28.] So that it will be our own fault entirely, if we are not freed from all our fears of perishing eternally; if we have not all the assistance that our hearts can desire, to bring us to heaven and happiness everlasting.

Let us therefore consider, what it is to go to Christ. It is to believe Him to be the Son of God, sent by His Father, out of pity to His poor creatures, to deliver them out of slavery and bondage, into which they were most miserably fallen. It is to become His disciples; to receive Him as our *Teacher*, in making known to us the will of God for our salvation. It is to receive Him as our *Priest*, who hath reconciled us to God, by offering up Himself a sacrifice, to satisfy the Divine Justice, and who is continually making intercession for all such as go unto God by Him. And lastly, it is to acknowledge Him *as our Lord and King;* that as such we are to obey His laws, and suffer Him to rule and govern us.

All, therefore, who will effectually close with this gracious invitation of Jesus Christ, must receive Him, as our *Lord*, to govern us by His Gospel; as our only *Mediator*, to prevail with God for our pardon; and as our only *Redeemer*, who laid down His life for us.

You see, my christian brethren, the gracious methods which God has made use of to awaken us, and to raise in our minds a spirit of fear, by letting us know, that we are to

SERM. XVII.

give an account for all the things we have done in the body, whether they have been good or bad; to the end that we may more gladly hearken to the merciful invitation of Jesus Christ, who knows the exceeding danger we are in without His help; and our souls being precious in His sight, He therefore most kindly invites us to come to Him, for light, for direction, for help, and salvation. And He has graciously promised to give rest and peace to all that come to Him, and are sensible of their wants and danger. He will convince them, that He has made their peace with God. He will assist them by His Spirit, so that sin shall not get dominion over them. And He will intercede with God, to grant us that happiness for which we were at first created.

Jer. 3. 12, 13. *I am merciful,* saith the Lord, *and I will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thine iniquities, and that thou hast transgressed against the Lord.* This is the language of God [Ps. 51. 17.] to sinners: A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise.

What now is required on our part to make this gracious invitation of Christ a perfect blessing to us? Why, to believe in Him with all our heart; for whoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

But then, this faith must be such as shall purify our hearts; such as shall lead us to repentance; such as shall bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

And this faith, being the gift of God, must be begged of Him with the earnestness of a soul that is weary and heavy laden, and such shall most certainly find rest unto their souls.

In one word; our great and only comfort is, in all our *troubles,* after all our *miscarriages,* under all our *fears,* that we have a SAVIOUR to go to, who even invites us to come to Him. A *Saviour,* who came down from heaven to seek and to save His lost creatures. A *Saviour,* who has redeemed us by His precious blood; who has made our peace with God; who is at the right hand of God, making intercession for us; who invites all, none excepted, to come to Him; and to whom none ever did go, as they ought to do, but found rest unto their souls.

But it must be Thou, O Jesus, who came to seek and to

save those that were lost and gone astray; it must be Thou, O Lord, who dost so graciously invite us, who must lead us to Thyself, or we shall surely miss the way.

Direct, gracious Lord, all such as desire to come to Thee. As Thou givest them a will, be Thou their *guide*, their *light*, and their *support*, till they come to Thee, and to that inheritance which Thou hast prepared for all those that obey Thy kind invitation. And this we beg for Thy promise sake; for Thy mercy's sake; and for the sake of that love which Thou hast had for our souls.

For which, all glory, and praise, and thanks, be ascribed to Thee, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, by us and by all Thy faithful servants, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XVIII.

THE DESIGN AND HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

O Blessed Jesus, Who came into the world to save sinners, direct and guide me by Thy good Spirit, that in this and all my labours for the instruction of my flock, I may set forth the mercy, the glory, and the goodness of God, and that by so doing, I may save myself, and those that hear me.

1 Tim. i. 15. Tit. ii. 14. 1 Tim. iv. 1.

See Matt. 7. 16, 22; 15. 9; 1 Cor. 10. 12; 2 Pet. 3. 3; Gal. 1. 4; Rev. 2. 5

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: and gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, [that is, a people peculiarly consecrated to Him] *zealous of good works. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; and* [Jude iv.] *turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.*

What I would now recommend to your serious consideration, are these following particulars: *First;* the great and merciful design of the Christian Religion. *Secondly;* how sadly, and by what means, this gracious design of God has been hindered or perverted. *Lastly;* what is like to be the consequence of this sad apostasy to christians of all denominations; and how every christian may contribute towards restoring christianity to its great design of saving sinners.

Now, the design of christianity, the Apostle tells us, is, *to save sinners,* and *that Jesus Christ came into the world for that very end.* And that the only way of saving them was, *by redeeming them from all iniquity:* forasmuch as all mankind were slaves to the devil, and to his temptations, to the world, and its wicked customs, and to their own corrupt inclinations; Jesus Christ therefore came to redeem them from

this slavery, and from eternal misery and death; and to gain to Himself a people who should be consecrated in a peculiar manner to His service; and that being purified by an holy life, and good works, they might be capable of heaven and of eternal happiness.

This was the great design of God in sending His Son into the world. And happy would it have been, if this gracious design had been universally closed with, and had not been perverted by the weakness of men, and by the wiles of the devil.

The Spirit of God foresaw this, and, by His Apostle, gives christians warning of it, and that, "in the latter times, men shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; turning the grace of God into lasciviousness;" that is, accommodating and suiting the doctrine of the Gospel to the corrupt inclinations of men.

We shall see, in the history of christianity which I shall set before you, how these seducing spirits have succeeded in all ages, in this attempt; that christians may beware of falling into the snare of the devil, and may be careful to have the true design of the Christian Religion always in their eye; which is, *to make men holy, that they may be happy.*

All men being by nature *sinners,* as such God could take no pleasure in them. Man had passed through several states of trial before the publishing of the Gospel by Jesus Christ; in a state of innocence before the fall; in the state of nature after the fall, with all the advantages of reason and free-will; and lastly, under the Law, with all the helps of outward ordinances. And the conclusion always was, as the Apostle observes both of Gentiles and Jews, "They were altogether abominable, there was none good." [Rom.3.12; Ps. 14. 3; 53. 1.]

Almighty God, therefore, Whose justice could not let wickedness go unpunished, and Whose infinite goodness would not let His poor creatures be lost, in His good time SENT HIS OWN BELOVED SON INTO THE WORLD, *to save sinners out of this sad condition.*

In order to this great and merciful design, His Son took our nature upon Him, and in that nature fulfilled the whole will of God. He set us an example, how we must live so as to please God; and, to satisfy the justice of God, He suffered

SERM. XVIII.

that death which every man living has for his own sins deserved. And, lastly, He left us His Gospel, as a rule to live by, and sent His Holy Spirit from heaven, to supply His place on earth, and to assist and conduct His faithful servants to heaven.

Thus JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; and few, or none, but *sinners*, received Him or His doctrine; that is, such whose hearts God had touched, and filled with a salutary fear for themselves, and a concern to know whether God would accept of a sinner's repentance; which was a question the Jews themselves did not know how to resolve, there being no sacrifice appointed in the Law for great and crying sins. And as for the heathens, they knew nothing at all of it.

Jesus Christ, and *He* only, could give sinners full satisfaction in this matter: for He came from God; His works shewed that He did so; He knew the mind of God, for He was His beloved Son; and He assured mankind, that God would accept of the sincere repentance of the greatest sinner; would not only pardon what was past, but would receive him into favour, and treat him as if he had *never* done amiss.

This was most welcome news to such as were weary and heavy laden with the burden of their sins. And for such as were in no fear for themselves, nor under any concern for what must come hereafter; to awaken them, He made known such important truths as these: that there is a life after death, and a life that is to last for ever; that good souls will be made happy, and that wicked souls will be punished to all eternity.

Now, this discovery of what must come hereafter startled all such as had any sort of seriousness. They saw plainly that die they must, and in a very short time; and that if what Jesus Christ did assure them was true, they had no choice but either to be happy or miserable, and that for ever.

And that which increased their fears was, that they found in their very nature an aversion, and a disability, to do such good works as were necessary to entitle them to happiness; and a proneness to evil continually, which must of necessity subject them to misery.

Here Jesus Christ and His Gospel came in to their relief;

for He gave them the utmost assurance, that upon their consecrating themselves to God, God would give them a Spirit, which should change their *hearts*, their *thoughts*, their *desires*, for the better; a Spirit, which should enable them to *believe*, and to *do*, such things as by nature they had neither a *will* nor a *power* to do; and that after that, it would be their own fault if they came short of eternal happiness, and if they escaped not eternal misery.

It was upon *these motives* that people first became christians. They were baptized, and received that Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ had promised, whereby they were enlightened in their understandings, and enabled to do and to suffer whatever the Gospel required of them, and to run all hazards *in this world*, rather than lose the *happiness* they *hoped* for, or be liable to the *misery* they *feared* in the next.

And this was to them another proof of the truth of the Gospel, that had wrought such a change in them for the better, which neither their own reason, nor all the rules of the wise men of the world, were able to effect.

For they found, by an happy experience, that they could renounce such pleasures as were inconsistent with a christian life, though grateful to flesh and blood. They became *serious* and *thoughtful* how to please God; and every day more unconcerned for such things as the rest of the world doted on. They were charitable and kind to one another. They suffered losses and persecutions with patience, as men believing that such things are not to be accounted of in comparison of heaven and hell.

In short; all that became christians upon such *motives* as *these*, (that is, of the necessity of being holy in order to be happy,) all such became holy, and exemplary for all worthy actions. They were *peaceable* in their lives, *chaste* in their conversation, *just* in their dealings, *constant* in their devotions, and *zealous* for the honour of God. They abhorred the wicked courses of the world, such as *whoredom*, and *drunkenness; lying, perjury*, and *covetousness;* and all other crimes, which they were assured, by Jesus Christ and His Gospel, would shut them out of heaven. And if there were any amongst them, who, forgetting the design of christianity, fell into crimes unworthy of the christian name, they were

SERM. XVIII.

immediately turned out of the christian society, by the strict and godly discipline of those days, until they should give sober proofs of their amendment.

This was the state of the christian religion for the first three hundred years after Christ's ascension into heaven; during which time, it spread itself over the face of the whole known world.

And this it did, notwithstanding its *doctrines* and *commands* were directly opposite to the corrupt nature and prejudices of mankind, and to all the religions and corrupt usages of the world.

And this was another proof of the truth of christianity,—that it should (as our Lord foretold) be preached and received in all the world; that it should be received without any outward force to compel men, without any countenance of great and learned men to persuade them, without any prospect of worldly interest to induce them to embrace it.

And one thing is here fit to be observed, because it is a confirmation of a truth which Jesus Christ very often told His followers; that *riches*, and worldly *powers*, and great *authority*, were great hindrances to the receiving His Gospel.

1 Cor. 1. 26. And accordingly, St. Paul takes notice, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called." It being very hard to flesh and blood, to renounce the love of riches, the esteem of learning, and the pleasure of authority and power, and to submit to be poor in spirit, to be despised, and thought ignorant for Christ's sake.

And experience still shews us, that what christianity is left in the world is generally to be found amongst such as want these temptations. It is amongst them we must look for a *trust* in God, a *faith* in His promises, a *submission* to His will, and a conformity to Jesus Christ, *humbled* and made of no reputation. For, if we go a little higher, we find, too often, either an excessive love for the riches of the world, and for the pleasures they afford; or an excessive pride, a proneness to libertinism, loose principles, or downright infidelity.

But to return to our subject. While men became christians out of a pure desire *to save their souls*, christianity was preserved in its purity, and converts were made, more by the

holiness of the lives of christians, than by their learning or other arguments. Till at last, something above three hundred years after Christ, the rulers of the world themselves (many of them) became christians; and then people, instead of being persecuted or reproached for being christians, were countenanced, esteemed, and rewarded, for the religion they professed.

And then, we may be assured of it, many became christians, for *interest*, for *fashion* sake, or out of mere humour, without ever considering what christianity required of them; what they promised to believe and do; or what they should be better or worse for it hereafter.

So that holiness of life, and the saving of their souls, not being what they proposed by becoming christians, nor the consequence of their being such; the SEDUCING SPIRIT soon took an advantage of this, and led them to dishonour their holy profession. It was then that the prophecy of our Lord was fulfilled: "While men slept, the enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat," &c. And this he did, first, *by attacking the faith of christians*, and introducing all manner of heresies, so that good christians were distracted, and their zeal for propagating of holiness of life was diverted too much, while they were obliged to defend the very principles of christianity. Matt.13.25.

These heats being in some measure abated, and the breaches made up, his next attempt was upon the morals and lives of christians.

Such as embraced christianity out of custom were not very careful to live according to its rules and laws; at the same time they had the Holy Scriptures in their hands, and they had the examples of Christ and His sincere followers before them, which shewed them plainly, that they were not what they should be.

The consequence of this was, that such as were not willing to part with their sins, and to lead a true christian life, and yet durst not renounce their religion, endeavoured to find out ways to make their minds easy; which they could not well do, whenever they compared their lives with the precepts of the Gospel, which yet they had in their hands.

And this brought a thousand corruptions into the Church:

SERM. XVIII.

every thing but holiness of life, and renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh, were greedily embraced.

In these times of ignorance, superstition, and wickedness, it pleased God to open men's eyes by the Reformation. The Holy Bible was translated into the language of most nations. And would to God the seducing spirit spoken of in the text, and his agents, had not prevailed so far as to cause too many to make a very ill use of the knowledge which they might have had from God's Word; but so it is. And many, who [Rom.1.18.] know their duty, *do hold the truth in unrighteousness;* and too, too many do spend their zeal, and which is generally all the religion they have, in unnecessary disputes.

But what is still more mournful, there is in these days a spirit of *infidelity*, of *libertinism*, and *profaneness*, gone out into the world, which was not known in former ages. And this, not only amongst protestants; but all good and sober men of the Church of Rome make the same sad complaint. That there are some, who, as the Apostle speaks, bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that redeemed them. Others who make a mock of all religion, deride the way, and the means of salvation; profane the name of God after the most astonishing manner; make a jest of Christ and His ordinances; do despite to His *Word*, His *day*, His *worship*, and His *ministers;* and who are, in all respects, worse than the Pagans, who know not God.

Lastly; there are others, who profess to know and to believe in God, and yet in effect deny Him, while they countenance those that despise Him and His laws; while they are pleased with the conversation of men that shew no manner of respect for *the Lord Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners*.

Be assured of it, good christians, these are agents of those seducing spirits spoken of by the Apostle; and whoever comes near them is in danger of being infected and ruined. For Ps. 1. 1. God will not be mocked. If men will *walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and stand in the way of sinners*, God will give them up at last *to sit in the seat of the scornful;* that is, to arrive at an height of wickedness, which once they were amazed at; and, scorning to be kept within the bounds of religion, they will therefore endeavour to make it ridiculous and contemptible.

And this is the true cause of the corruption both of *faith* and *manners*, which is so justly lamented.

The corrupt nature of man, being desirous to live under as few restraints as possible, first invents ways to keep up the hopes of heaven, without parting with any satisfaction on earth; *and so the faith comes to be corrupted.*

When that will not do, and men will not part with their sins, nothing but atheism can make them easy. By atheism, I mean such a way of living as obliges them first to *wish*, and then to *say*, THERE IS NO GOD; and so the lives of christians come to be corrupted. But then how dreadful must their case be, who have nothing to depend on, but the hopes that the Word of God, His promises, and His threatenings, may not be true! This is a sad blindness indeed! But it is the just and natural punishment of a wicked life.

And now you see, in the short history of the Christian Religion which I have given you; you see, how far the christian world is departed from that concern, that zeal, that piety, and constancy, which animated those that first embraced christianity. And yet we have the same reasons that *they* had, to be very much concerned for what must become of us when we die.

Were *they* sinners; so are *we?* Had they reason, as sinners, to be afraid for themselves; and have not *we* the *same* reasons? Are not heaven and hell still in being? Are not these still to be the portion of good and bad men, as each shall deserve? Have not *we* the same hopes, and the same promises, that *they* had? Did not Jesus Christ come into the world to save *us*, as well as them? Is there any other way of being saved, but what they took? That is, to consecrate ourselves to His service, and to be zealous of good works.

Jesus Christ came *to redeem us from all iniquity*, to *deliver us from this present evil world.* Is the world less wicked *now* than it was *then?* How comes it then that we are so little apprehensive of its snares, and of our own danger? [Tit. 2. 14; Gal. 1. 4.]

Shall I tell you the truth, and the secret of this? It is with christians as it was with the Jews; they were God's peculiar people; they took no care to live like people so highly favoured; God gave them up to their own ways, rejected them from being His people, and from being a nation.

SERM. XVIII.

Let us now look at home. People greatly value themselves for being christians. And *because Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,* they depend upon *that;* not considering, that some sinners will be *saved,* and others *damned;* which makes a very great difference.

They flatter themselves, that their salvation is *now* in their own hands; and so live like those that have no reason to fear, though they are in the midst of snares.

They see others, even almost all about them, as little concerned as themselves, without considering, that it will be little comfort to be undone with never so much company.

They will see no hurt in what Jesus Christ has forbidden, for the very same reason that Eve had to eat the forbidden fruit, *because it pleases their senses.*

Have not christians some reason to fear some such consequence as the Jews experienced? It was what the Spirit
Rev. 2. 5. of God has foretold: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works, or else I will remove thy candlestick;" that is, unchurch thee.

This brings us, in the last place, to consider how much every christian may contribute towards restoring christianity to its great design of *saving sinners,* which was the great design *of Christ's coming into the world.*

And let us not, good christians, any of us, pervert, or make void, this design, by building our hopes of salvation upon any thing that is merely external; such as, the bare name of christians, or an outward conformity to the usages of the Church we live in. Always remembering, that true religion cannot consist in any thing which a wicked man can do as well as a good man.

We have seen how others have perverted the design of christianity, and brought many errors into the Church. Would to God, this were only the crime of past ages, and that the present age were not concerned in it! But so it is, and so it will be, while christians will desire to go to heaven without parting with their sins; they will seek out, and depend upon, expedients and ways to make their minds easy, which will not profit them in the end.

He who came to save us, *must save us* after His own way,
[Tit. 2. 14.] *by purifying us to Himself a peculiar people;* that is, a people

consecrated to Him after a peculiar manner, not only by outward ceremonies (which was what the Jews and Heathens depended on for recommending them to God's favour); but by a change of mind and heart. For if we are not very much changed for the better; if we are not restored to the image of God, in which we were created; we can never be saved: WITHOUT HOLINESS, without an holy temper, and holy dispositions, NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD. [Heb. 12. 14.]

We must not only abstain from sin, and do what *custom*, or *interest*, or *human laws*, may lead us to; but the love of God must be the governing principle of our lives. And this must appear in our being *zealous of good works*, in order to please God, and in obedience to His commands.

People of reason and faith will consider, that the *Christian Religion*, its *hopes* and *fears*, its *promises* and *threatenings*, do not depend upon the opinion of men, but are as *true*, as *certain*, and as *unalterable*, as God Himself. So that such as live without religion must die without hopes of mercy.

This should, one would think, awaken christians into a better sense of their duty.

We are astonished to hear a profane man deny the truths of the Gospel; and yet it is in the end the same thing, whether a man denies them, or does not consider them, and live according to them. Both the one and the other must perish.

That we may avoid this sad choice, and not make void our Redeemer's merciful design *to save us;* may I, and every one who now hears me, seriously think of it, THAT NOW IS THE ONLY TIME IN WHICH WE ARE TO CHOOSE WHERE WE MUST BE FOR EVER; whether in a place of happiness or misery.

Let us endeavour to possess our hearts continually with the *belief*, the *certainty*, the *possibility* (if it is not our own fault) of being saved,—of being saved and happy for ever.

For considering what God has done for us, in sending His Son into the world, it is plain, that He desires our salvation more than we ourselves do.

And let us not despair of succeeding. The grace and Spirit of God will enable us to overcome all difficulties;—His grace may be had for asking;—the most unlearned, who is sensible of his own wants, can ask so as to be heard.

SERM. XVIII.

[Matt. 19. 25.]

Let no christian therefore say, as Christ's disciple once did, WHO CAN BE SAVED? Every *christian*, every *sinner*, every *man*, to whom this word of salvation is preached, may be saved, if he will strive to work out his salvation with a concern answerable to what he is to gain or lose by it.

The misery of it is, christians are apt to say, WHO CAN BE SAVED? And yet live as if it were the easiest thing in the world; as if there were no manner of hazard; as if every body would be saved of course. This shews the corruption of our nature with a witness; and this corrupt nature must be mended, as ever we hope to be saved.

Indeed, we are all *sinners*. But our greatest danger does not lie in *that*, because we have a certain remedy at hand; but our great danger lies, in our not sufficiently considering the danger of sin, and in our rejecting the only remedy; in not considering, that this life is given, and continued to us, for no other end, but that we may every one of us work out our own salvation.

For this life is indeed *a state of trial;* and it concerns every one of us, as much as his soul is worth, to take care how he spends this short life; forasmuch as God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, when every man will receive a sentence according to his works done in the body, that is, in this life. By which sentence, *they that have* DONE GOOD, who have been zealous of good works, *shall go into* LIFE EVERLASTING; *and they that have* DONE EVIL, and have not repented of the evil they have done, *shall go into* EVERLASTING FIRE.

[Matt. 25. 41; John 5. 29.]

Dreadful sentence indeed to all such as will not close with the salvation offered them by Jesus Christ; who will not *consider* and *take pains*, and *do good now*, that they may *escape the bitter pains of eternal death!* But a comfortable sentence to such whose life is full of good works; who try and judge themselves now; and who endeavour to prevent the judgment of God by a sincere repentance.

And now, good christians, what can I add more, than to exhort and to beseech you, that you take care, *that no seducing spirit beguile you of your reward*, by leading you into error. That no profane person, or instrument of *that seducing spirit*, of which there are but too many amongst us, do weaken your

faith, or laugh you out of your hopes of heaven. That no loose and debauched persons, *who are slaves of that evil spirit,* do by their pestilent examples make you as wicked as themselves, and fit only for the society of devils when you die. And lastly, that your own corrupt hearts do not betray you into an indifference for your souls, and for the things that concern your eternal welfare.

And may the Blessed Jesus Christ, *who came into the world to save sinners,* may He enable all of us so to live, that, when we come to die, we may be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting. *Amen.* [1 Tim. 1. 15.]

SERMON XIX.

ALL PLEAS AND EXCUSES FOR LIVING IN IGNORANCE AND SIN MADE VOID BY GOD, IN MAKING HIS WILL AND PURPOSES KNOWN IN THE GOSPEL.

JOHN xv. 22.

But now they have no cloak [or, excuse] *for their sin.*

IT is most natural for people, *when they have done amiss,* to lay the blame any where but on themselves; and it is *as natural,* when they would follow their inclinations against their conscience, to hope that God will accept of what excuse they can make.

Our first parents did so. The *man* blamed the woman; the *woman* blamed the serpent; when the fault was plainly in *themselves:* and accordingly they were *both* punished, notwithstanding their apology.

It was just so with the *people of the Jews.* They had impatiently expected the Messiah, whom God had promised by His Prophets from the beginning of the world. When the Messiah came, they utterly rejected Him, though He had most *undeniable proofs* of His being *sent from God;* particularly His *doctrine,* which was most worthy *of* God, and His *miracles,* which were such as none other ever had done. To *these* Jesus Christ appeals, and declares, that after *this* "they had no cloak for their sin." That such as should reject *Him,* and the *gracious message* He brought them from God, whatever they had to say for themselves, they would be punished as most *wicked opposers* of God's good will towards them.

Now, as *inexcusable* as these people were in denying their Lord and Saviour, notwithstanding the *abundant proofs* of

His authority, it will appear, that this is the very case of all such christians *as profess to know God, but in works deny Him;* that men are as apt *now,* as ever they were, and with as little reason, to offer excuses for those sins which they commit against the light of nature and the laws of God; but that this *sentence* of Jesus Christ, "they have now no cloak for their sin," is as righteous and true against us, if we obey not the Gospel, as ever it was against the Jews, who crucified the Son of God; and we shall as certainly be punished (whatever we can say for ourselves) as ever they were. [Tit. 1. 16.]

Now, that this may appear with all the plainness that a matter of this importance should do, and may more sensibly affect all our hearts, I shall *first* lay before you such *excuses* as men are apt to offer for their living in ignorance and sin: and then I shall endeavour to satisfy you, that God has most effectually made void all *pretences* and *pleas* whatever, by making His will and purposes known to us, after so gracious and convincing a manner. And then it will appear, whether we can have *any cloak for sin,*—any that can hide us from the wrath of God *revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* [Rom. 1. 18.]

I. And first, I shall lay before you *such pleas and excuses as men usually offer for their living in ignorance and sin.*

It is certain, no man chooses to live in sin *on purpose to displease God.* It is as sure, that few people think they shall die in their sins unrepented of, and that they shall have *eternal torments for their portion.* But here is the case: we are but too apt, through the corruption of nature, to be very fond of many things, which God (knowing they would hurt us) has forbidden us, upon pain of His everlasting displeasure. His everlasting displeasure we cannot think of without horror: neither can we, without some *trouble* and *pains,* deny ourselves, or do what God has commanded us.

We have therefore found out *some excuses,* which, for the present, serve to make our minds easy, though we live in a careless neglect of God's commands, and consequently of *our own salvation.*

For example:

First; There are people who think, that if they have not *faith,* it is for want of *sufficient evidence;* and that they are

SERM. XIX.

not bound to obey the Gospel, till they confess they have reason to do so.

Secondly; There are others who excuse themselves upon the account of *worldly business,* which takes up most of their thoughts and time.

Thirdly; And there are very many who doubt not but that their *want of capacity* to know their duty, will excuse their not doing it.

Fourthly; It is often said, that *temptations* are so many, and the *difficulties* of religion so great, that an allowance must be made, or few would be saved.

Lastly; If no other excuse will do, people are most apt to shelter themselves under the *mercy of God,* and hope (through His goodness) all will be well with them at last.

Now, it is most certain, that none of these (and these are the most common excuses) will save us from the wrath of [1Pet.4.17.] God, *if we obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I. And first, they that would make *the want of faith a cloak for their disobedience,* are either such as *pretend* they want *evidence to convince them* of the truth of the Gospel; or they are such as complain they want a degree of faith sufficient to incline their hearts to obedience.

The first are such as are by Jesus Christ Himself condemned in this place. They *would not,* and they pretended they *could not,* believe "that He was sent from God;" they despised His *message;* they would not receive His *doctrine;* they gave no heed to His *miracles;* nor would they have [Acts 26. 22.] patience, or be at the pains, to see whether this was *He whom the Prophets did say should come.* In short, they could not say what *would* convince them, if neither a *doctrine* worthy of God, nor *works* which none but God *could* do, were not sufficient. Jesus Christ therefore, without giving them *more proofs,* or *the sign* they demanded, positively pronounces their judgment in these words, "now they have no cloak for their sin."

And truly, it is to little purpose to argue with unbelievers of this sort, where the fault is not the want of evidence, but the want of an heart disposed to receive it. And, therefore, the Spirit of God is never solicitous to prove *such things* as all people *ought* to know, and *may* know, if it is not their

own fault. Thus Moses begins the history of the creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth:" [Gen. 1. 1.] supposing, most truly, that he who has his eyes open, and does not, *from the greatness and beauty of the creatures, acknowledge the Maker of them*, all the arguments in the world will not convince him. And the Apostle saith expressly, *all such* Rom. 1. 20. *are without excuse.*

Unbelievers, therefore, of this sort, we must leave (as our Saviour has done) to the judgment of God.

But then there are others, who hope they may with more reason plead their *want of faith;* that is, such a *lively faith* as may oblige them, in good earnest, to live as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Now, being told "that faith is the gift of Eph. 2. 8. God," they are apt to conclude, if they have it not, it is not their own fault; and *this* is their cloak, *this* their excuse. And indeed it will be a *good excuse*, provided a man can honestly say, that he hath seriously considered the danger of living in disobedience to God's commands; that he hath heartily acknowledged, before God, his own inability to keep them without His grace; that he has prayed for God's grace, and followed the motions of His Spirit, as far as he was able; that he has *at least* done what was in his own power, and kept out of the way of temptations; that when he has done amiss, he has been sorry for it, begged God's pardon, and resolved not to do so again. If a man cannot say this with truth, it is plain he is not in earnest, and therefore want of grace will be no excuse before God, who knows that this is the least of his concern.

The Word of Truth saith, "Ask and ye shall have, seek [Matt. 7. 7. and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." We will do *none* of these, and yet we wonder that God does not give us a convincing witness of the truth in our hearts. In short, we faintly wish, that God would "touch our hearts," while we are *in good earnest* afraid lest He should do so, and force us to lead a new life.

While it is *thus* with us, it is no wonder that God does not more effectually *touch our hearts*. The wonder indeed is, that people should ever hope that this will excuse their disobedience.

After all, we are too apt to think this, and believe that we

SERM. XIX.

are in no danger, because we do not fear any; as if people could not harden their hearts, and be in danger, without perceiving it, when the whole Bible is a history of men ruining themselves, without fear or wit, even after they had sufficient warning of what would follow.

To give but one instance: that people of the Jews were forewarned by Christ (whose miracles justified His authority), that their obstinacy and wickedness would, in a short time, bring such a destruction upon their temple and city, "that there should not be left one stone upon another." Now, were *they* any farther from this desolation, or did God excuse them, or defer His judgments, because they did not fear this, or because they would not believe Christ's words? The application is plain.

[Matt. 24. 2; Luke 19. 44.]

II. But if want of faith will not excuse our *disobedience*, we are apt to think that *worldly business will excuse us from making the care of our souls the great concern of our lives.*

Our blessed Lord saith the direct contrary. He saith, for instance, that a man makes a very ill bargain for himself, "who gains the whole world, and loseth his own soul." To this, people think it is enough to say, it is a burden laid upon us,—*in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.* We must live, and we must take care for those that come after us. As if the wise and good God had made the difficulties of this life *so great*, that men cannot take due care of their bodies and souls too.

[Matt. 16. 26.]

[Gen. 3.19.]

After all, it is a *most plausible pretence*, and such as we are most apt to think a good one; and therefore Jesus Christ has used a great many arguments to hinder us from making the cares of this life a cloak for not minding the next. "Consider the fowls of the air; consider the lilies of the field;" your heavenly Father feeds and clothes the one and the other. "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow;" leave that to heathens, who know not God; "but seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

[Matt. 6.26, &c.]

These arguments are so plain, and so full to the purpose, that there are few christians who do not believe it their duty to think of another world, and prepare for it.

But then we have another pretence for not doing it at

present. When we have *provided* for *ourselves*, for *old age*, and for *our families;* then we shall, *by the grace of God*, in good earnest leave off all our evil ways, and become *new creatures*. But pray, what promise have we that God will *then give us His grace?* These are the words of the promise: "To day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." [Ps. 95. 7, 8.] Will not our conversion *then* be too difficult a work? Shall not we be more likely to despair than undertake it? We know what the Scripture saith of such a change: "Can the [Jer. 13. 23. Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then shall ye also, that are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well."

In one word; Industry in our several callings is a christian duty; the care of our souls is a duty also, and much the more necessary. We may mind them both, if we please. And our fault is this: We are sent a while into this world to fit us for a better, and instead of doing so, we resolve to set up our rest here, and scarce think of the other.

III. And now we come to those who think that their *want of capacity to know their duty will excuse their not doing it.*

There is nothing more common than for people to cry,—What can be expected from the like of us? We know no better: "To whom much is given, from him much will be [Luke 12. 48.] required:" but that is not our case; our talents are few, and our accounts are soon made up. And upon the strength of this way of arguing, many people make themselves tolerably easy.

Now, it is certainly true, the account we shall give will be according to the talents we have received. But then, as, when we compare ourselves with others, we are apt to *over-value* ourselves; so when we think of the account we must give, we are as apt to *under-value* what we have received.

Is it *knowledge* you want, and hope that *that* will *excuse* you? Why, let me tell you, that the learnedst man you know has just as much knowledge, and is just as much better for it, as he keeps more strictly the commandments of God; which you may do (if it is not your own fault) as well as the most learned. Hear what Christ saith to this purpose, "Whosoever heareth My words, and doeth them, I will liken [Matt. 7 24.]

SERM. XIX.

him to a wise man." *This* is *true wisdom;* all the rest is folly, let a man be never *so knowing* in his own or other people's opinion.

But how shall we know what is expected from us? Why, just as you know any thing else, by *enquiry,* by *consideration,* and by taking the advice and direction of those whose business it is to inform you.

To be plain: there is not one of those ignorant people who hope their want of knowledge will help to excuse them, but will give a very suitable answer when he is asked any thing about his worldly concerns. He knows, for instance, very well the difference betwixt an estate which he can leave to posterity, and *one* which is at the *will* of another. If such a man's estate is in danger, you will soon see how sensible he is, and that he will lay all business aside to secure what he thinks *the main chance.* He will consider with himself, he will advise with others wiser than himself, he will *ask* to be informed, be *impatient* if he is put off, very thankful when he is *told* what he ought to do; he will do all this with seriousness, and a concern answerable to what lies at stake.

Tell one of these ignorant people of a good bargain, which is in his power to make for himself; you will soon see with what cheerfulness and good understanding he will go about it.

So for *cases of conscience,* such people very well know, when they are wronged, what justice they ought to expect. They can tell other people their duty plain enough; and is it not mere perverseness to pretend not to know their own?

But let people pretend what they please, every body knows what is meant by *adultery, drunkenness, perjury, lying, backbiting,* and such like. Now, we have a plain declaration of God's will and purpose, concerning all such as commit any of these sins, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

1 Cor. 6. 9, 10.

Will people, after such a plain declaration as this, live in any of these sins, and hope that God expects no better of them? Verily even *they,* who think that God has given them

the poorest capacities, if one should tell them that it is their duty to live as they generally do, would soon see the wickedness of such a doctrine, and would profess that they know better things themselves.

After all, it is a question, whether the unlearned lie under greater difficulties than those that are more knowing. The favours of God to men are more equal than is usually thought of; and therefore, where He has given more slow capacities, He will (if they do not resist his will) give more grace. "I thank Thee, O Father, (saith Jesus Christ,) that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." [Matt. 11. 25.]

Accordingly, as too many can make a shift to go to hell with a great deal of knowledge; so we find many poor people, and of low capacities, as *conscientious* in their dealings, as *true lovers* of God, as *fearful* of offending Him, as *thankful* for His favours, as *careful* of their ways, as those that have a great deal more knowledge, and better opportunities of knowing their duty.

So that want of capacity (and in a christian country) will never be accepted as an excuse for not keeping the commands of God; especially when it is considered, they who know least know enough to make them serious and careful of their ways; that they might know a great deal more than they commonly do; and that they seldom live up to that measure of knowledge which they have.

Such, therefore, as love darkness rather than light; such as may know their duty, and will not; and such as know their duty and yet neglect it, are (without more words) *inexcusable.*

IV. Another excuse is, that *the temptations we meet with are so many, and the difficulties of a holy life so great, that an allowance must be made, or few can be saved.*

Well then: are they who make this excuse, resolved to take *the broad way?* You know, there are but *two;* the *narrow,* which leadeth unto life; and the *broad,* which leadeth to destruction: so saith our Saviour expressly, Matth. vii. 13; and tells us, moreover, that they are but few, in comparison, who take the narrow way, which leadeth unto life, because it is unpleasing to flesh and blood; while the other, because it is easy, is most chosen and thronged.

SERM. XIX.

It is but too plain, that such as make this excuse are in that way which leadeth to destruction. The only question is, whether they are resolved to go on in it? Especially when they consider, that it certainly leadeth to *that place,* "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

[Mark 9. 44.]

Is it for nothing that God has made this known to us? Is it not that we may awake out of sleep? That we may see the danger we are in, and overcome all difficulties, for a few days, that we may escape being miserable for ever? And that we may be encouraged to do so, the Spirit of God has assured us, that our *reward* shall be great hereafter,—our comfort in the mean time such as cannot be expressed,—and that we shall have *such assistance* as shall enable us to overcome all difficulties. We have therefore but this choice, either to follow *our own inclinations* for a while, and be miserable for ever; or to obey the will of God (though we meet with uneasiness), that we may obtain His favour, and be eternally happy. And it is mere folly to expect any other issue of our *obedience* or *disobedience.* For thus God has dealt with men since the world began: Such as obeyed Him, with their whole hearts, found their advantage in it; and such as followed their own wicked imaginations were rejected of God, and delivered up to destruction.

Lastly; *When no other excuse will do, people are apt to shelter themselves under the mercy of God, and hope through His infinite goodness, all will be well with them at last, though they should not do their best to please Him.*

It is most certain, that mercy of God in Jesus Christ is the only hope of sinful men; but then, it is strange presumption to hope, that because God is good, I may therefore be bold to provoke Him; especially, after God has expressly declared how far and to whom His mercy shall extend,—who may and who must not depend upon it. In particular, He has declared, that to the *impenitent* and *unbelievers* no mercy shall be shewn, whatever they may hope for. And that we may not mistake His meaning, He has plainly told us, *true penitents are such as bring forth fruits meet for repentance;* and that *true faith is such as purifieth the heart.* So that if this word is the rule by which God will judge us, and by which we may judge whether we are out of danger or not,

[Matt. 3. 8; Acts 15. 9; 1 Pet. 1. 22.]

we see plainly, that the mercy of God will be of no advantage to us, while we knowingly transgress His laws.

Nay, that this may be *no cloak for our sin*, the Spirit of God has told us with what contempt God will treat those that, being often *reproved*, and *called upon*, do still harden their hearts till affliction comes upon them: "I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." [Prov. 1. 26.]

And now you see, how much people may be mistaken; how apt they are to deceive themselves; how rash, and how presumptuous, in concluding all may be well with them, without any warrant from God's Word. And this should make us more cautious of trusting to a *false peace*, a *peace of mind* without *reason* and without *promise*.

What I mean is this: let us carefully examine ourselves, whether we do not depend upon some of these, or some such like pretences, for our future happiness? Always remembering, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. That the duties of christianity are *indispensable*. That God did never excuse any one of His servants, from the beginning of the world to this day, from *observing* them faithfully. *That no man can serve two masters;* so that it is in vain to call myself a *servant of God*, when I do not the things which He has commanded. [Heb. 12. 14.] [Matt. 6. 24.]

Let us consider farther, that if we meet with temptations, it was designed *we should do so*, that we might thereby be obliged to depend more entirely upon God. That if we are sometimes at a loss, it is *so ordered*, that we may look up to God for light and salvation. That *if we love darkness rather than light*, it is no wonder if we miss our way, and are bewildered. That if we want hearts to set about the work of our salvation in good earnest, it is because we know, *in our consciences*, that we never sincerely prayed to God to give us grace to do so. That if we are careless because the rest of the world are so, and hope to come off as well as others, it is because we do not consider, that it will be no comfort to be damned for company, no more than it would be pleasure to be *poor*, or *sick*, or tormented *here*, for company. [John 3. 19.]

Let us consider a little farther: That want of time can be *no excuse* in a christian country, where one day in seven is set apart for *this business* and *none else*. That want of capa-

SERM. XIX.

city cannot be pretended, when we understand things much more difficult to be known. That to put off the concern of our souls to the last, is plainly to value them less than any thing else. That to think ourselves safe, because we do not fear any danger, is to be ignorant of a great truth, which is—that people may be given over to *a reprobate mind,* that is, a mind void of judgment. Lastly; that such pretences as these will rather increase our guilt, than serve to obtain our pardon, when we appear before God. And the conclusion will be, that he who seeks out excuses for not living as becomes the Gospel of Christ, is only contriving how to shut himself out of heaven.

In one word; a man that is heartily concerned for his salvation will ask himself this one short question, *Why do I hope to be saved?* He that dares not do this, may depend upon it *he is not in the way of salvation.* And he that is once fully persuaded, that without a *sincere repentance,* a *lively faith,* and an *unfeigned charity,* he cannot be saved, will never think of making excuses to free himself from these duties, and the fruit of them—*holiness of life.* For a man to be at ease upon any other account, or to hope that any thing in the world will atone for want of true piety, is to hope without *reason* and without *Scripture.*

This is what was necessary to be said, to keep us from *false hopes,* and an unsafe peace of conscience; which that it may do, I commend it and you to the good blessing of God. And I beseech you, my beloved, remember this *one* thing,—*that all is vanity, besides taking care of your souls.*

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, &c.

SERMON XX.

CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE, AND THE NECESSITY OF A REDEEMER.

LUKE v. 5. *We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.*

And so we shall ever do, without Thy grace and help, O Jesus. Enable me, therefore, I beseech Thee, to speak to the hearts and to the capacities of those that hear me. Let me learn and be able, from the sense of my own corruption and frailties, to pity such as are ignorant of the danger they are in; to warn such as are careless; and to comfort and direct such as are weary with the burden of their sins, and lead them to Thee, their Redeemer, for Thy merit's sake, O Blessed Saviour. Amen.

ROMANS vii. 24, 25.

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Why; *the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

See Ps. 85. 9; Baruch 4. 4; John 15. 4; Acts 4. 12; 13. 26; Rom. 3. 23; 5. 8; Gal. 3. 13; Eph. 2. 4; 1 Tim. 1. 15; 1 John 3. 1; 4. 19.

THE meaning of these words will be fully understood, if we look back to some verses going before; particularly to verse 18: "I know" (that is, I feel by sad experience), "that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will" that which is good "is present with me;" that is, I easily perceive it; "but how to perform that which is good I find not;" that is, of myself I am not able to do it.

Now, it being thus with me, *the good that I would* (that is, that which my reason approves), *this I do not; but the evil which I would not* (which my conscience tells me I ought not to do), *this I do;*—this troubles me, grieves me, and makes me afraid for myself, and even forces me to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (who shall free me from these bodily appetites, which enslave me, and expose me to ruin?) *who shall deliver me?* why; THE GRACE OF GOD, vouchsafed unto mankind, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD; this will de-

SERM. XX.

liver every man, who sincerely lays hold of it, from the slavery of those sins which do so easily beset us.

Now, I shall take occasion, from these words, to lay before you—*First;* The great corruption of human nature. *Secondly;* The great danger we are in on that account. *Thirdly;* This will shew the necessity and blessing of a Redeemer. *Fourthly;* We shall then see plainly the great love of God in sending His Son to redeem us. *Fifthly;* We shall consider, the great obligation this love of God lays upon christians. And *lastly;* The dreadful condition of all such as neglect or despise this great mercy of God vouchsafed unto men.

Believe it, christians, that what I am going to say to you upon these heads will be worthy of your most serious attention. They are truths on which our salvation depends, and therefore I would press them upon your hearts with all imaginable plainness, as well as earnestness.

I. Let us first consider *the great corruption of our nature;* the knowledge of this being the foundation of all true religion. "They that be whole (saith our Redeemer) need not a physician, but they that are sick;" *these,* and *these only,* will desire and value the help that is offered them. Jesus Christ (said the Prophet Isaiah, lxi. 1.), when He cometh, *will preach glad tidings*—but to whom? why, *to the meek;* for such only would be disposed to receive His message: *He would bind up the broken-hearted,* for such only would be glad of help: *He would proclaim liberty to the captives,* for such only as are sensible of the bondage of sin will be glad to be set at liberty.

[Matt. 9. 12.]

[Isa. 61. 1.]

It was such as these that our Lord invited, when He said, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," with the burden of your sins, "and I will give you rest."

[Matt. 11. 28.]

In short; wherever the Gospel was preached, all such as feared God, and were in fear for themselves, when they were told of a judgment to come, these received the Gospel with a glad heart, as shewing them the way to obtain pardon and happiness. Whilst *all the proud,* as the same Prophet speaks, *and such as do wickedly, fearing no evil,* to such the Gospel will be preached without effect.

[Mal. 4. 1.]

Now, my design, in the first place, is, to raise in your

hearts *the same concern and fear* which the Apostle supposeth every man *will* have, who sets himself seriously to consider his condition by nature, and without a Redeemer.

Our first parents were *most certainly* created innocent and upright, able and disposed to obey any commands that God should think good to give them.

We are very sure it is not so with us *now*. Every one for himself knows, that matters are wretchedly amiss with us, until by the grace of God our nature is changed for the better. Whoever will be at the pains to look into his own heart, will find this corruption of nature discovering itself upon all occasions. For instance: we readily acknowledge the justice of the laws of God; and yet we find an unwillingness in ourselves to obey them. We know that we want both knowledge, and grace, and help, from God; and yet we ask them but seldom, and with indifference. We cannot but own, that we live upon God's bounty and blessing; and yet we can hardly find in our hearts to be thankful. We profess to believe, that God sees all our actions, and yet we are too apt to sin as presumptuously as if He were an idol, who could neither reward nor punish us. In one word; we hear what He has threatened, without fear, and see His judgments upon others, without so much as thinking how soon it may be our own case.

These are desperate disorders, whatever people think of them. But these are not all the proofs of a corrupt nature. We are forced to struggle hard with ourselves to do what we know to be not only our *duty*, but our *interest*, to do. The Lord our Maker, we confess, has a right to be *loved*, to be *feared*, to be *depended* upon. Can we say with any truth, that we are naturally disposed to *love*, to *fear*, and to put our whole *trust* in Him? Do not we find in ourselves too great an indifference for the glorious promises God has made us; and do not we discover a very little fear for His terrible threatenings?

Our own experience may convince us, that we are apt to have a much greater concern for our *bodies* than for our souls; for this life, than for that which is to come; for *earth*, than for *heaven*.

If our reason does sometimes get the better of our corrupt

SERM. XX.

affections, and we resolve to do what we believe will please God, yet how soon do we forget our good resolutions? One day condemning ourselves for having done amiss; and the next day running into the same miscarriages, and falling into the sins we so lately repented of.

If we look into the world, we see nothing, in a manner, but sin and disorder. We see too many who live without God in the world, committing all iniquity with greediness; upon whom no reason, no arguments, will prevail, to hinder them from ruining themselves to all eternity.

Even amongst those who pretend to live in the fear of God, how many do we see, upon whom His laws have little or no influence? Do not we see, for example, that many—too many—must be forced by human laws, and the punishments that attend them, to do what they know in their consciences they ought to do; to do justice to their neighbour; to make satisfaction to those that they have wronged.

How many are there who make a *mock* of sin, though they know that it must be most displeasing to God; and make a jest of damnation, which ought to make the stoutest heart to tremble; who are not content to be wicked themselves, but take pains to corrupt others? And (without giving any more proofs of the corruption of nature) do not too, too many live, as if they did not believe there is a God, either to reward or punish them?

All these pretend to reason; and indeed God has given all men reason. But lusts and passions will corrupt and blind our reason; what then would become of the wisest of men, if God did not help us by His Spirit and by His grace?

You see, christians, what we are by nature, what men are capable of, what they *would* be, when God leaves them to themselves and to their own natural corruption. You shall now see,

II. *The very great danger we are in on that account,* if God should leave us to ourselves, and to our own natural powers.

When one looks into the world, and sees the generality of people without any concern and fear for themselves, and for what may come hereafter, one cannot but conclude, *surely they do not know the danger they are in.*

This is indeed the root of all our misery. We are in the

way of ruin, and do not mind it. We are afraid of laying things to heart, lest they should make us uneasy; and our misfortune is, that we are not (the generality of christians) so uneasy as we should be.

For who *can*, who *ought*, to be easy, that knows, that *considers*, the danger to which his corrupt nature exposes him? For, as such, in the first place, he is under the displeasure of God, and, without God's help and grace, he *must* continue so unto his life's end; forasmuch as no man *can* change, *can* mend a corrupt nature, by a *reason* and *will* that are both corrupt.

Now, God can take no pleasure in any man, until his nature be mended; till then he is an enemy to God, and under the government of Satan. This we learn from the commission which the Apostles had from Christ Himself, Acts 26. 18. which was, "To preach the Gospel to the heathens, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

What the power of Satan is, we learn from many instances of Scripture; and we see with our own eyes the sad effects of his power upon those who are under his government, *and* [2 Tim. 2. 26.] *who are led captive by him at his will.*

In short; these are the evils which, as fallen creatures, we are, every soul of us, subject to; a corrupt heart; the malice and power of wicked spirits; a proneness to evil continually; the temptations of an evil world; a weakness of nature which cannot withstand them; a certain prospect of death; the fears of a judgment to come; the continual dread of the sentence then to be passed upon sinners; and lastly, the assurance that we cannot possibly deliver ourselves out of this sad condition.

The thoughts of these things are enough to make the stoutest heart to tremble, and to distract the wisest man living, if the God of mercy had not proposed a way to deliver us out of the danger that threatens us.

These dangers I have set before you, not to drive you to despair; but to awaken us all into a just sense of the unhappy state we are in without the blessing of a Redeemer.

III. *The necessity and blessing of a Redeemer*, we now come to consider.

Now, every thoughtful person *may* be convinced, that *as*

SERM. XX.

fallen creatures we *must* have forfeited all the favours which God designed us at our creation. That we lost that Holy Spirit by which our souls were united to God, and by which we had power to know, and to do, whatever God should require of us. That by the loss of that Holy Spirit, our reason became insufficient to guide us; our will and our affections became ungovernable, so that of course we became subject to all manner of wickedness. That, while this was our condition, God could take no pleasure in us, and we had nothing to expect but the punishment due to our offences. And, lastly, that we could not, by any thing we could do, help ourselves out of this sad condition.

Now, does not all this shew us the absolute necessity of a Redeemer; of one, who could undertake to make satisfaction for our offences to the Divine Justice; of one, who could plead with God for His lost creatures, who could prevail with Him to forgive us, and to receive us again into His favour?

Who does not see the necessity of some one, who could let us know upon what terms God would forgive us; who could shew us the way and means of salvation; who could give us that Holy Spirit which we had lost, to help us to regain our former happy state; of one, who could help us to subdue all our enemies spiritual and temporal; who could set us an example how we ought to live so as to please God; and lastly, one who should be able to deliver us from the wrath to come?

Now, all this our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, has done for us. He has given us the greatest assurance, that for His sake God will be reconciled to us; that he will accept of our repentance when we have done amiss; that He will treat us, as He would have done our first parents, had they not so grievously offended Him, if we will but be governed by Him; that He will give His Holy Spirit, to sanctify and mend our corrupt nature; and, what is the most astonishing mercy, He has prevailed with God, to make us everlastingly happy, if, during this short life of trial, we will but do our best to fit ourselves for that happy state.

And lastly, to magnify this blessing, every one, from the first man to the last that shall be born, may have an interest in this blessing, if he loseth it not by his own fault.

IV. Now let us consider *the great love of God, in sending His own Son to be our Redeemer.* "God (saith our Redeemer) so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3. 16.

That our hearts may be touched with a sense of this mighty blessing, let us consider ourselves as poor, wretched, sinful creatures, in the certain way to ruin, utterly unable to help ourselves. Then let us look unto God, who has millions and millions of creatures better than the best of us, who never offended Him, always ready to serve and glorify Him. What, can we think, could move this great God not to overlook this vile part of His creation, but to give His own Son for their redemption? Why, verily, this love of God passeth our comprehension; nor could we have believed it, had not this His Son laid down His life to assure us of His Father's love for His poor creatures.

This love of God, this tender concern for lost mankind, will appear still more surprising, when we consider, that He made this His only Son to become subject to the law made for sinners, and to all the miseries and afflictions which sinners deserve and are subject to; to *poverty*, to *contempt*, to *sorrow*, to *pain*, and to *death* after all, in order to deliver us from eternal death.

I know there can be no case on earth to be compared to this love of God, in order to raise our value for so great a blessing.

However, let us imagine, how we should value one who had delivered us out of a cursed slavery, and paid our ransom; or one who had hazarded his own life to save any one of us from certain death? And has not our gracious God done this, and much more than this, for us? But how few are affected, as they ought to be, with this amazing instance of *love*, *mercy*, and *goodness*.

I will but just hint to you some instances of His mercy in this dispensation, in which He has had a merciful regard to all our disorders.

God knew that our reason, corrupted by our passions, was not able to lead us in the way we should go; for as the Spirit of God assures us, and we find it by sad experience, "There [Prov. 14. 12.]

SERM. XX.

is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." God has therefore given us safe and infallible rules to walk by, to lead us to heaven and happiness. He knew how apt we are to go astray; He has therefore promised, for our Redeemer's sake, to accept of our repentance. He knew the weakness of our nature, and the difficulties, and enemies, we had to struggle with; He therefore offers us the assistance of His Almighty Spirit.

In short; the greatest sinner may be sure of pardon, if it is not purely his own fault; the weakest christian may depend upon all the assistance that he can possibly want; the meanest servant of Christ may be assured that he will not be overlooked; and every christian has a sure promise that his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. This will lead us to another particular:

V. To consider *what obligations this great Love of God lays upon christians.*

Do not imagine, christians, that God intended that all this love should be lost upon us, or that He expects no other fruits of His Son's labours and sufferings, besides a bare profession of gratitude. *Woe be to that man who acts as if he thinks so!*

We do indeed, in our daily devotions, give God thanks in a very particular manner *for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,*—a *love* which passeth all possible expressions and acknowledgment on our part. But what will this signify, if in our works we deny Him; if in our lives we are like heathens, not knowing or not valuing the blessing of a Redeemer?

What then does God expect from us, on account of this mighty love? Why, that we should act like reasonable creatures, like people who know they are upon their trial, and that this is for eternity; who may be happy if it is not their own fault, and who will be miserable beyond redemption, if they close not with this offer of mercy.

God expects, therefore, that we should glorify Him in our lives for this His great goodness; that we should convince the world that we do really believe the things we profess to believe, by working out our salvation with fear, with a concern answerable to what we hope for, or what we fear. He

expects that we should remember what manner of love He had for us, that we should be called the sons of God. That we should resolve with those mentioned in the book of Wisdom, [xv. 2.] "We will not sin, knowing that we are accounted Thine." That we should not debase ourselves by becoming the servants of Satan, from whose dominion we have been redeemed by the precious blood of His dear Son; but should let the love of God constrain us to shew our gratitude, by fruits worthy of so great a mercy; especially in these dangerous days, wherein the name of Christ is blasphemed, and His sufferings not valued by unbelievers, occasioned chiefly by the bad lives of christians; but then they are such christians as are certain to be shut out of heaven, for being as bad as infidels.

There is one other obligation which the Spirit of God has laid upon all such as value the blessing of a Redeemer: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." This is to be the motive and the pattern of our love for our neighbour. "This command we have from God, that he who loveth God do love his neighbour also." 1 John 4. 11. 1 John 4. 21.

This leads us to consider in the last place,

VI. *The sad condition of those who neglect, or despise, this mercy of God.*

It is the Spirit of God who hath declared, "That there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." So that whoever does not lay hold of this means of salvation must undoubtedly perish to all eternity. Acts 4. 12.

If you wonder how it is possible for any man who knows this to hazard his soul to all eternity, the Apostle will give you the true reason: "The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." 2 Cor. 4. 4.

Little do wicked men and unbelievers think, that *Satan, the God of this world,* is he who is perpetually suggesting to them such things as weaken and destroy their faith, such pleasures as blind their understandings, such ways of living, as lead them directly to hell. And yet it is certainly so; he hath blinded their eyes, so that they cannot see the consequence of *abused* mercy, nor the sad condition of *being given over to a reprobate mind;* though there be no condition

SERM. XX.

more dreadful, than for a man to be subject to the justice of God, without any interest in His mercy. This made David, (though in the main a good man,) this made him mourn so bitterly, when, through the corruption of his nature, he had grievously offended God: "I am sore troubled; mine iniquities are an heavy burden; I go mourning all the day long." What a dreadful condition had he been in, even to eternity, had there been no sacrifice for sin? And, indeed, there was none under the Law for such sins as his was, as he himself acknowledges; nor would his troubled spirit, his broken and contrite heart, have been accepted for his pardon, but only for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of all from the foundation of the world.

[Ps. 38. 6.]

In one word: we may, if we will but consider, we *may* judge how sad our condition and danger is, without a Redeemer, by the way which God has made use of to save us from ruin. Nothing, in the decrees of God, nothing could save us, but the sending of His own Son to lay down His life for us.

I have set before you, christians, the great disorders we are by nature subject to; the great hazard we are in on that account; the only sure remedy we have to trust to; the great goodness of God in pitying our sad condition; what He requires in return for this mercy; and the sad consequence of not closing with His gracious designs for our good.

Great kindnesses, or great judgments, are the usual methods by which God reduces His poor wandering creatures. Which of these methods will you wish to be dealt with? I have set before you the greatest instance of love, goodness, mercy, and kindness, that was ever shewed to men or angels. If this does not work upon you, and if ever you hope to be saved, you have nothing to look for, but to be reclaimed from the ways of sin by severe judgments. But this is not what God delights in; He would have *His goodness,* and *that only,* to lead men to repentance.

[Rom. 2. 4.]

Few people can be easy without something which they call religion. For God's sake remember this truth: that no religion will be of use to us, which does not mend our corrupt nature, and by doing so restore us to the favour of God;

which does not bring us to love Him for His goodness to us, and to strive to glorify Him by leading a christian life; by an humble dependance on His providence, and submission to His will; and by doing good in our generation. Without this, all our religion is vain, and we shall still be in the way of perdition.

Have a care, christians, of a delusion which too many are in danger of being ruined by, by fancying that the corruption of their nature will be some excuse for their unchristian lives. God commands us certain duties; He offers us all necessary assistance; He proposes to reward us according to our sincere endeavours to obey Him. To say after this, *we are all sinners, and who can help it?* without resolving that moment to repent and amend, is an affront to our dear Redeemer, and a doing despite to the Spirit of Grace.

We are ready enough to own the blessing of a *Redeemer*, when we only consider Jesus Christ as coming into the world to save sinners; as being our *Advocate with God* to accept of our repentance. But we should always remember, that He is also our *Lawgiver*, and that we must obey His laws, or He will be no blessing to us. You see therefore, christians, to whom our Redeemer will be a blessing; even to such as by a saving faith, and a sincere obedience, do suffer themselves to be made partakers of a divine nature.

And now, before I conclude, I must advise you of two ways by which Satan will attempt to divert you from making a profitable use of such doctrines as these; either he tempts christians to despair, and out of a deep sense of their corruption to cry out, *O wretched creature that I am, who shall deliver me from the sin that does beset me?* Or he tempts them to believe, that since Christ came into the world to save sinners, it is a very easy thing to be saved. These are both of them very dangerous delusions.

Jesus Christ did indeed come into the world to save sinners; but what sort of sinners? Why, such as do forsake their sins, and fully purpose to lead holy lives for the time to come. But as for such as depend upon a bare outward performance of the duties of christianity; who comfort themselves with being able to say, *We have ate and drank at Thy table, and we are called by Thy name;* our Lord Himself has

SERM. XX.

declared what judgment He will pass upon such christians: "Depart from Me; I know you not." A sentence (believe it, christians!) that should make the very best of us examine whether our lives and our works do answer our outward profession.

Luke 13. 27.

As for such sinners as are truly afraid for themselves; who sincerely lament the corruption of their nature, and, out of an earnest desire to please God, cry out, *who shall deliver me from this body of death?* let such always remember what follows: *I thank God through Jesus Christ;* that is, for His sake God will deliver me from the evil effects of the corruption of my nature, from the power of the devil, and from eternal death.

If it be so, you will be apt to ask, Why then are there few that be saved? The case is sad, but plain; people will not fear for themselves; they will not part with their sins, nor lay hold of the mercy offered them.

But may every sinner (says the desponding christian) be confident that God will pardon those who have so many ways offended Him? Take an answer, not from me, but from the Son of God Himself, Who has declared, even with an oath, "Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men."

Mark 3. 28.

Why should any, the most fearful christian, imagine, that that Divine Shepherd, Who with so much love and pains came to seek His lost sheep, that He will turn His back upon one that cries after Him for help; that He would lay down His life for His sheep, and after that reject them. Let not the most disconsolate christian entertain such unkind thoughts of God, and of our good Redeemer. Rather let us comfort ourselves, under the most desponding thoughts, with the argument of the Apostle: "If when we were sinners and enemies to God, we were reconciled to Him by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by Him; for He ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Rom. 5. 10.

And now, let me leave this one truth upon your minds; it is a truth as certain as this [the Bible] is the Word of God, that unless our corrupt nature be mended before we die, we shall never go to heaven, never be happy.

May the good Spirit of God fix these truths in all our hearts, for Jesus Christ's sake. To Whom, with the Father and that Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour and glory now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXI.

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

THE NATURE, THE POWER, AND THE MALICE, OF EVIL SPIRITS; AND THE NECESSITY OF A STEDFAST FAITH IN THE PROTECTION OF GOD.

MARK v. 13.

And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea.

See Eccles. 39. 28; Luke 10. 17; John 13. 27; 2 Cor. 2. 10, 11; Eph. 2. 2; James 4. 7; Rev. 12. 12.

THE Church has appointed *this festival,* that we may not forget that there are *other beings,* besides those we every day see and converse with, with which we are greatly concerned; the Word of God assuring us, that both *good and bad angels* are appointed or permitted by God, the one to succour and defend us, the other to hurt and ruin us, whenever we take ourselves from under His protection.

Sometimes we are apt to ascribe too much power to evil spirits, and to be too much afraid of those whom we suspect to have dealings with them. And sometimes we despise them and their power, as if we had nothing to fear from them. We are in the wrong in both these extremes.

The history which I am going to explain to you will give us a better account of these matters. It is mentioned by three of the Evangelists as a subject which the christian world ought to be well acquainted with; so that you may be sure it is your duty to know and understand what God has revealed to us concerning the *nature,* the *power,* the *number,* and the *malice,* of those evil spirits that are about us, and

how we may be secure from any evil they can do to us. The history is this:

There met Jesus a man possessed with a legion of devils: his condition was very miserable; he was night and day in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones; he had been often bound with fetters and chains, but to no purpose; he plucked them asunder, neither could any man tame him. Jesus, seeing him in this condition, had compassion on him, and commanded the evil spirits to leave him. They knew they must obey, but they besought Him that they might go into an herd of swine that were feeding hard by; the very nature of them being to do mischief whenever they are permitted. Jesus, that He might convince the world how dreadful their malice is, and how great their power when left to themselves, and not restrained by God, therefore gave them leave. And behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And that very legion of evil spirits, which just before could not destroy one poor man (their power being limited by God), can now destroy with ease two thousand other creatures, having obtained leave so to do.

When Jesus was about to leave this place, he that had been possessed with the devils besought Him that he might be with Him; fearing, very probably, that the devils and his disorders might return, when once his deliverer should be gone, and at a distance from him; but Jesus suffered him not to go with Him, but bade him go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him. From which He would have us to learn, that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, and that His providence is sufficient security against all attempts of the devil, provided we are but in the way of our duty.

Now, from this history we learn three truths of great importance. *First;* that the devil is a spirit of great malice and great power. *Secondly;* that both his malice and power are altogether under the government of God. And *thirdly,* that God often permits him to do great mischief for the punishment of wicked men, and for the trial of the faith of good men.

SERM. XXI.

I. And first; *that the devil is a spirit of great power and malice,* is made known to us as often almost as he is spoken of in the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul expresses his power after this manner: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," that is, against men like ourselves, "but against the rulers of the darkness of this world," against *wicked spirits,* who endeavour all that is possible to make men as wicked as themselves. And St. Peter likens him to "a *roaring lion,* seeking whom he may devour," that is, whom he may be permitted to destroy. "He was a murderer from the beginning," saith our Lord, John viii. 44. And, Rev. xii. 9, he is said *to deceive the whole world.*

Eph. 6. 12.

1 Pet. 5. 8.

And, because we are more affected with what we *see* or *hear* to be done by him, this history is recorded, that we may not want sufficient evidence of what he can do.

Having got possession of the poor man, *he had no longer rest.* Being forced by the command of Christ to leave this habitation, his malice went as far as he knew it would be suffered to go; for getting possession of the swine they were immediately every one destroyed.

Now this miracle being the only one of all that Jesus wrought, which brought any thing that looked like an injury to any man, we may be sure it was permitted, in order to fix a lasting impression and remembrance upon all that should hear of it, what great power the devil has when he is let loose to do what he pleases. And it was well even for these very people who lost their goods, that they knew the power of evil spirits by such a judgment as this. For the devil could as easily have destroyed two thousand of *them,* as two thousand of their swine, had God permitted him to have used his power.

II. *For being entirely under the government of God, he can do nothing without God's permission.*

The text saith, "Jesus gave them leave;" to assure us, that without his leave they had no power. And in the book and history of Job it is revealed to us, that the evil spirit has no power to exercise his malice but when he has express leave from God: "Hast not Thou made a fence about him, and about all that he hath?" This that the devil complained of was Job's security; but when God gave the word,

Job 1. 10.

"Behold, all that he has is in thy power," we see what short work the devil made of all that the world calls happiness. He left him neither *estate,* nor *child,* nor *health,* nor *friend,* except God only; in Whose providence, notwithstanding his severe afflictions, he continued to put his trust, and in the end it turned to account, and for his good. Job 1. 12.

And our Lord told St. Peter, "Behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;" that God would deliver thee from that great trial and temptation; and accordingly he was delivered by the grace of God; though God suffered Satan to proceed so far as to make St. Peter to deny his Lord against his most solemn promises and resolutions. But then this was to shew us two things; *first,* what poor weak creatures we are when left to ourselves, and to Satan to govern us; and *secondly,* that the devil's malice is restrained by God, Who permits him to make use of just so much malice as will answer God's ends and serve His glory. Luke 22. 31, 32.

III. *That God permits the devil to make use of his malice and power, for the trial of good men, and for the punishment of the wicked,* is what we now come to consider, and to prove by the Word of God.

And in the first place, this is what the Spirit of God foretold the Church of Smyrna: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. 2. 10.

This was the case of Job, and this was the great mistake of his friends, who thought that punishment was *always* for the faults of him that suffered. And yet our Blessed Saviour, by the decree of God, was to be the most afflicted, while He was the most innocent, of men. And His apostle St. Paul had a messenger of Satan, that is, a disease by God's permission, inflicted on him by Satan, to prevent that pride which would otherwise have ruined him. 2 Cor. 12. 7, 8.

In all these cases, good men have a sure promise to support their spirits: "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10. 13.

SERM. XXI.

But then this is not always the design of God's permitting the devil to have his liberty; it is very often to punish the wicked that He takes off His restraining power. "He cast upon sinners" (saith the Psalmist, lxxviii. 49.) "the fierceness of His anger, by sending evil angels amongst them." And God had no sooner decreed to destroy Ahab for his wickedness, but an evil spirit forthwith undertakes to bring him to destruction, by becoming a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets, whose advice he followed to his ruin.

1 Kings. 22. 21.

By this time you will perceive, good christians, that God has mercifully provided for our instruction, in preserving this history in all its particulars for the use of His Church. Here is the great power and malice of the devil: here is the providence of God restraining and limiting him, how far he shall go, and no farther: here is God's sovereignty over all creatures, let who will be the owners of them: lastly, here is the miserable estate of those that are under the power of the devil, and are led captive by him at his will. All these things are set forth in this history, so as to affect our minds after the most sensible manner.

You cannot think that this history was recorded by *three* Evangelists, only to entertain our curiosity, only to be read and forgot, and the thoughts of it laid aside. Pray then, let us consider the use we ought to make of what at present you have heard.

And first, the power of evil spirits is made known to us, in order to make us more careful of our ways, lest they get an advantage over us. "Be sober, be vigilant, (saith the Apostle,) because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." If people will live as if they had no enemies, notwithstanding the warning God has given them, their ruin is plainly of themselves.

1 Pet. 5. 8.

We have need, you see, to mind the Apostle's directions, "To put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Particularly, *a stedfast faith in the power of God*, which will oblige us to depend upon Him as a child upon his father, and not suffer us to doubt either His *good will*, or His readiness to succour us.

Eph. 6. 11, 12.

The text saith, "Jesus gave them leave." You see then, that without God's leave they cannot hurt the meanest of

His creatures. How careful then should we be to put ourselves, and all that belongs to us, under God's protection every day of our lives; how easy and secure when we have done so! Being well assured, that it is not in the power of the devil, or his agents, to go any farther than God permits them.

You see, thirdly, how careful we should be, *not to grieve the Holy Spirit by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption.* [Eph. 4. 30.] For when the Spirit of God forsakes us, there are other spirits very ready to take the government of us. It is said of Saul, that when "the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him;" and it may be as truly said of all wicked men, that when they forsake God, God will forsake them, and then they are under the power of the devil. [1 Sam. 16. 14.]

And indeed all the world are under the government of God and His good angels, or under the direction of Satan and his evil spirits; and therefore, before we are received into the Church of Christ, we do solemnly renounce the devil at our baptism; by which sacrament we are put under the immediate government of God and His good angels, who are by God appointed to minister unto them that are heirs of salvation. [Heb. 1. 14.] Now, if we force these good angels to forsake their charge, there are others always ready to take us again into their power.

And here I shall take occasion to explain the meaning of two passages in the New Testament, and of speaking upon a subject which is not so well understood by christians as it ought to be. The passages I mean are, 1 Tim. i. 20, and 1 Cor. v. 5, in both which places we have mention made of *delivering wicked men to Satan.*

Now, because this is laughed at by profane people, who do not know the Scriptures, I will shew you what this means.

The Spirit of God then tells us, that the devil hath a kingdom and subjects, over which he reigns; that is, over the children of disobedience: and that Jesus Christ has also His kingdom and subjects, even all that obey His laws. And therefore, when the apostles and ministers of Christ gained any of the subjects of Satan unto Christ, they are said in Scripture, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." [Acts 26. 18.]

SERM. XXI.

Now, when any of Christ's subjects shall become rebellious, and refuse to obey His laws, His ministers are directed to admonish them of their sin, and of the dishonour they do their Prince and Saviour; and if they shall refuse their godly admonitions, then they are to turn them out of the Church, that is, that society which Christ governs by His laws, protects by His power here, and intends to bless with eternal happiness hereafter.

Being thus turned out of Christ's Church (that is, excommunicated), they are said *to be delivered to Satan*, not to be damned, as blasphemous people love to charge the ministers [1Cor. 5. 5.] of Jesus Christ; but, as the Apostle saith, "That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;" that is, that sinners, if they are not utterly lost, may, with the prodigal when he was forced to herd with swine, see the happy state they are fallen from, and repent, and desire to get out of the snare and from under the dominion of the devil, and be restored to the favour of God. So that excommunication is made use of, not as a *punishment* only, but as a *remedy;* that sinners being awakened and startled at the evil state they are in, being deprived of all hopes of salvation, while they are out of the Church, they may more earnestly desire to be restored to God's grace and kingdom, that they may work out their salvation with more fear and caution for the time to come.

Were these things well considered, christians would not look upon excommunication as a light matter, but would dread it (when inflicted according to the will of Christ for crimes against God),—they would fear that sentence as they would hell fire. They would be afraid of Church censures, and of despising or weakening that discipline which Jesus Christ has appointed to guard His laws from contempt, and to preserve His subjects from destruction.

To be delivered to Satan! What a dreadful thought must that be to any one who does but read this history which we are now upon! And though every subject of Satan is not in the condition of this poor creature, without rest night and day, cutting himself with stones, and wandering in the mountains and amongst the tombs, yet it is misery enough to be under the government of Satan, whose servants are slaves, and whose wages is *eternal misery*.

The next thing that I would propose to your consideration is this: that as there are, as appears by this history, *legions* of evil spirits, so we are assured, for our comfort, that there are *legions* of good spirits much more powerful than the other, and always ready at God's appointment to succour those that shall be heirs of salvation.

When our Blessed Lord was assaulted by His enemies, St. Peter drew his sword to defend Him; but Jesus bade him put up his sword, assuring him that instead of twelve disciples to fight for Him, He could, if He desired it of God, have twelve legions of Angels. And when Elisha was beset by the Syrians in Dothan, and his servant in a fright cried, "Alas! my master, what shall we do?" the Prophet answered, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And immediately "the Lord opened the eyes of the young man: and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." 2 Kings 6. 15, &c.

Agreeable to which, saith the Psalmist, "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." And in another Psalm, "He shall give His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Ps. 34. 7. Ps. 91. 11.

This being so, you see, good christians, what folly it is, and want of faith, for a christian man to be afraid of the devil or his agents, while he takes care to put himself and his concerns under God's protection. A witch cannot hurt you, but by the help of the devil; the devil himself is under God's command, and must have His leave before he can destroy the meanest creature.

Do but trust in God, and pray for His protection, and all the powers of hell cannot touch you, nor any thing that belongs to you.

But then I must tell you, that the devil may gain a power, though limited, over the bodies or goods of such people as are so ignorant or wicked as to have to do with his instruments; namely, charmers, witches, fortune-tellers, or the like. People do not consider this. If they can hope for ease from their pains, or any present advantage, they are little concerned whether it comes from God or the devil. No man, who calls himself a christian, ought to have to do *less* or *more* with such people and practices, lest he become a sub-

SERM. XXI.

ject of Satan and his kingdom, while he thinks the least of being so.

I know that simple people have been persuaded to make use of these instruments of Satan, because they make use of some good words, as they say, or Scripture expressions; but so did the devil himself, when he tempted our Saviour to fall down and worship him.

Christians should rather consider, that affliction cometh [Job 5. 6.] not out of the dust (as Job speaks), but is the appointment of God, and not to be removed till God pleaseth, nor by any means but such as He hath ordained.

And if we consider, that though St. Paul had the gift of healing in an extraordinary manner, yet he was limited to exercise this gift as God ordered it, for he could neither re- [2 Cor. 12. 8, 9.] move *his own thorn in the flesh*, though he earnestly prayed [1 Tim. 5. 23.] to have it removed, nor Timothy's frequent infirmities, which he only advised him to help by a prudent use of wine and water.

So that afflictions are not always to be removed, even by miracles: never by charms, which are certainly of the devil, who by this means would draw men from trusting in and looking up to God, to trust in vanities.

Another use which I would desire you to make of this history is this: never to make a rash and wrong judgment of the misfortunes that befal other people. God may have ends to serve which we know not of; it would be rashness, perhaps, to say, that this people deserved such a loss and judgment more than any of their neighbours; but we may with safety say, that Jesus Christ did, in this judgment, teach His Church, after a very sensible and affecting manner, that the devil is a spirit of irresistible power when God lets him loose to do mischief; and that he is restrained by God so as not to hurt the vilest creature without leave.

You will learn from hence to abhor that great wickedness of wishing the devil may take either man or beast. You see what mad work he can make when he has his liberty. And though God may for His own glory restrain him, yet you discover, by your horrid wish, the most wicked disposition that the devil can inspire any man with.

To conclude the whole: we have no way to be secure from

this great adversary of our souls and bodies, but by being in God's Church, under God's protection, constantly praying for His help, and that He would give His Angels charge concerning us, trusting in His power, and resisting the devil and all his temptations.

And may our gracious God, who knows us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that we cannot always stand upright; may He grant us such protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory now and for ever.

SERMON XXII.

THE NECESSITY, AND THE GREAT BLESSING AND COMFORT, OF SECURING THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Romans viii. 14.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

When our Blessed Lord was to leave the world, He assured His disciples, that one should be sent *to supply His place;* to *comfort* them for His absence; to *guide* them into all truth; to bring all things to their remembrance, whatever He had taught them; to sanctify their persons, and bless their labours. By whose labours we, amongst many other nations, have been brought out of darkness and error, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ.

This indeed is a *mighty blessing;* but this is not all. This would not have answered the great love and design of God, to save His lost creatures: for such is the weakness and corruption of our nature, that though we should be convinced, even by miracles, of the truth of the Gospel; though we should know the will of God never so well; yet we are not able, of ourselves, to walk in the commandments of God. And therefore it was necessary, that the *same Spirit,* which enabled the Apostles of Christ to *convert* the world, should continue to guide, to assist, to defend, and sanctify, *all such* as by *their* ministry should be converted in the great work of their salvation; that is, *all such* as being convinced of the truth of christianity do desire to walk worthy of that name and calling.

For it is too plain and sad a truth to be denied, that all are not christians *indeed,* who yet own the truth of the Gospel, and are persuaded of the necessity of obeying it, and have embraced its profession. Not that the Holy Spirit denies His graces to any that are dedicated to Him in baptism; but men thrust Him from them; refuse to ask His assistance; grieve Him by their evil deeds, and force Him to forsake them, and to leave them to themselves, and to the government of evil spirits, who walk about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may be permitted to devour, finding them forsaken of God, and prepared for destruction.

Forasmuch therefore as it would be no blessing for men to be convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, by considering the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost, by which it was at first established, unless they afterwards live answerable to what that religion requires of them (which they cannot possibly do, without the continual grace and assistance of that same Holy Spirit); the Scriptures therefore are very express in exhorting christians to strive and pray for the graces of the Holy Spirit, that they may live as they have believed.

And that christians may not be mistaken, and lay too much stress upon their being made in baptism *children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven,* without taking great care to live like children of so holy a Father, and like people who hope to go to heaven; the sacred Scriptures, I say, have most particularly set down the *marks* and *characters* of such christians as may hope for benefit by their Christian profession. "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ (saith St. Paul), he is none of His." Rom. 8. 9. "If we live in the Spirit (saith he, in another place), let us also walk in the Spirit;" Gal. 5. 25. that is, if we pretend to be born again, let us live like people that are become new creatures. And in the words which I have chosen for a text, "As many (saith he) as are led by the Spirit of God, they [and they only] are the sons of God." They only can call God *Father,* so as to be heard by Him; so as to have their prayers answered; so as to be rewarded by Him.

And that christians may not fancy that they are led by the Spirit of God, when indeed they are not, the same Apostle Gal. 5. 22, 23.

SERM. XXII.

sets down, in plain terms, what are the fruits of the Spirit of God, or of one that is led by the Spirit of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is, *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, courteousness, goodness* (or a readiness to do good), *faithfulness, meekness, temperance*" (or continence).

[Gal. 5. 22, 23.]

From this, it appears, that men are *not masters of themselves.* Led they *must be,* either by the spirit and powers *of darkness,* or *by the Spirit of God.* It is for *this reason,* that God, for Christ's sake, has given us the earnest of His Spirit in baptism; with this assurance, that he who submits to be governed by His Spirit, and brings forth fruit worthy of such a favour, he shall still have greater favours conferred upon him; but he that is not careful to improve the graces God gives him, from him shall be taken away, even what was before bestowed upon him.

Now, if men, *notwithstanding this caution given them,* will be making experiments how far they may neglect their duty, without losing the earnest of God's Spirit; if they will try to govern themselves by their own reason and wisdom, laying aside the laws of God; why then, they may, indeed, take themselves from under God's oversight and direction; but servants still they must be, and led *they must be,* by the spirit and powers of darkness; they only change masters (for a master they *must* have); and how much for the worse, sad experience will soon shew!

It is for this reason that *humility,* and *care,* and *watchfulness,* are so much recommended in Scripture; lest christians should grow conceited of their own wisdom and ability to govern themselves; lest they should neglect the means of grace which God has already given them; and lest, being often off their guard, the devil should at last be permitted to take them into his kingdom and service; from whence they cannot return to God when they please, no more than a dead man can return to life by his own power.

And this, by the way, is the true reason why neither *advice,* nor *authority,* neither the *hopes of heaven,* nor the *fears of hell,* can prevail with some sinners to forsake the evil ways they have taken. They are not their own masters; they are servants to one, who will not suffer them to return to their sober reason; they have forsaken God, and God has

given them up to a reprobate mind, *a mind void of judgment;* so that they commit all iniquity with greediness, yea, though they see their ruin attends it.

On the other hand, such as are *led by the Spirit of God* do experience His assistance in the whole course of their lives; enlightening their understandings, convincing their judgments, awakening their consciences, curing the perverseness of their nature, and filling their souls with all those graces and virtues which are necessary to fit men for heaven. Hence it comes to pass, that men who of themselves are not able to think one good thought, yet by God's grace and Spirit do very plainly perceive the excellency of religion and piety; the folly and unreasonableness of sin; the happiness that attends the one, and the misery that must be the reward of the other.

Hence it comes to pass, that a poor weak creature, assisted by the Spirit of God, is able to resist the prince of darkness with all his hosts of evil angels. Hence it is, that man, who is naturally proud and obstinate, is yet brought to humble himself before God, acknowledge his own nothingness, confess his sinfulness, and that he merits nothing but misery. Hence it is, that man, who is naturally blind and ignorant in the things which most nearly concern his eternal welfare, yet enlightened by the Spirit of God, can very readily apprehend divine truths, can see the wisdom, and goodness, and love of God, in all that He has commanded, or requires of us. And to give no more instances but this one, of the power of the Spirit of God upon those with whom He dwells, and who suffer themselves to be led by Him; hence it is, that christians are brought to embrace doctrines so very uneasy to flesh and blood, so very unacceptable to corrupt reason: *Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that use you spitefully.* [Matt. 5. 3, &c.]

Well; though all these truths were delivered by the Son of God Himself; though they were confirmed by infinite miracles; yet if God had not sent His Holy Spirit into our hearts, we might indeed have heard these doctrines, but receive them, *we never could have done it,* much less have

SERM. XXII.

practised them. But by the assistance of God's good Spirit, all these things are made *easy* to the understandings, *acceptable* to the wills, and *possible* in the practice, to all true believers.

Now this great blessing, of the *fellowship of the Holy Ghost*, is so far from being given as a reward of any thing we have done, or can do, that it is bestowed upon us before we do any thing at all, namely, when we are received into covenant with God; for then, that is, at our baptism, we are made *children of God, a new creation, temples of the Holy Ghost, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.* And our life, after this, be it never so holy, is entirely owing to the constant *influence, guidance,* and *assistance,* of this Blessed Spirit.

And it is for this reason, that christians are so often admonished not to look upon their own works as any thing in God's account *meriting our justification;* since, as God, for Christ's sake, forgives us our sins, so it is the Spirit of God alone, which enables us to walk worthy of such a favour all our days; shewing our thankfulness for the same, by our obedience; and glorifying God for His mercy to us, by an holy life.

Now, forasmuch as christians are but too apt to fall into a *carnal security,* they are to be often called upon to try whether they have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, or whether they have not lost, or are in danger of losing, so necessary a guide?

But how must they do this? Why, they must have *such marks* as cannot possibly deceive *any,* but such as are *willing to be deceived.* We do not bid them, for instance, look to their own *inward experiences,* since even good men often lament their want of faith, even when they are supported by it. And many, with little reason, fancy themselves to have the Spirit of God, when a worse spirit governs them.

We must therefore tell christians, that they have no way so sure of knowing whether they have the Spirit of God, as by considering the *fruits* the spirit which possesseth them produceth in them; namely, whether their great aims and designs are to be *happy in this world,* or to *please God,* and to secure the fellowship of His Holy Spirit unto their lives'

end. *This* every body is capable of knowing, who will be at the pains of searching the bottom of his own heart. For if he finds that his thoughts are chiefly upon another world, and that *this* so affects his heart, that his endeavours after holiness are sincere; *then* he may be well assured *all is well with him.* He has the word of God for it, Rom. viii. 1, 16: "There is verily now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.—The same Spirit beareth witness with our spirit (or consciences), that we are the sons of God." That is, if we are led by the Spirit of God to walk worthy of Him that hath called us, we may be satisfied in our minds, that we are under God's *protection, guidance,* and *favour.*

It now remains, that we consider how we may continue so; that is, how we may secure *the fellowship of the Holy Ghost,* which we receive in baptism, unto our lives' end.

And first; though we owe all the grace which God has given us to His Holy Spirit, and must always depend upon Him for the continuance of it, yet we must still use our best endeavours in the use of those means which God has ordained, in order to fit us for heaven. For certainly men take the most effectual way to deprive themselves of God's assistance, when they neglect to do what is already in their own power, that is, what God has enabled them to do, though it be never so little; for when a man does what he *can,* it is a sign that he is *sincere.* And therefore, at the same time that the Holy Scriptures bid us to depend upon God, they exhort us "to work out our own salvation;" that is, on our part to do all that God by His preventing grace has convinced us we ought to do, and which by His assisting grace He will enable us *to do,* if we sincerely ask His help. Phil. 2. 12.

And secondly; that we may secure the presence and assistance of God's Spirit, we must be careful to mind His godly motions, exciting us to our duty, checking us when we are doing amiss, and comforting us when we do what pleaseth God. Not to do this is, as the Apostle speaks, "doing despite to the Spirit of grace;" "resisting the Holy Ghost," as St. Stephen says the Jews and their fathers had done, which brought destruction upon them. Heb. 10. 29. Acts 7. 51.

Lastly; we must above all things be careful not to grieve

SERM. XXII.

and provoke Him to forsake us, by *sensuality*, by *uncleanness*, or by *living in any known sin;* and even by an undue application to, and an affection for, earthly things, which, our Matt. 13. 22. Lord assures us, *will choke the word*, and the Spirit, by which it becomes a means of grace, and it becometh unfruitful.

If to this we add our *sincere prayers*, out of a true sense of our own inability, and God's readiness to help us through the mediation of Jesus Christ; we shall then be secure of the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, being assured by our Lord Luke 11. 13. Himself, that our heavenly Father *will give the Spirit to them that ask Him*, as certainly and readily as any father will give good things to his children that ask him bread, or what is needful for their life and well being.

And now, good christians, you see the necessity of *Christian baptism*, by which we have the Spirit given unto us; without which Spirit it is impossible for any man to work out his salvation. You see the reason why very many, though they have received the earnest of God's Spirit in baptism, are yet as wicked as those that never heard whether there was any Holy Ghost or not. They have neglected His motions; they have grieved Him by their evil deeds; they have forced Him from them, and are become servants of another master, whose delight is in wickedness. You see therefore the necessity there is of *walking warily*, lest by adding one sin to another we provoke God to leave us to ourselves; for then you have heard who it is that immediately takes possession of us.

You see of what little use it is to be convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, if we do not seriously apply to the Spirit for grace to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ. Lastly; you see the danger of neglecting the means of grace which the providence of God affords us: it is the ready way to be forsaken of God and left to ourselves.

To conclude then. Do we desire the satisfaction of knowing whether we are under the government of the Spirit of God? Why, we are to consider whether we are led by the Spirit of God; that is, whether the fruits and effects of that Holy Spirit appear in our lives and conversations. If, for instance, we love God, and endeavour to please Him to the

best of our power; if we love our neighbour in deed, and in truth; that is, doing good as well as giving good words; if we are just in all our dealings, doing to others as we would be dealt with ourselves; if we deny our own wills, and resolve never to please ourselves by displeasing God; if we are afraid of sin, and keep at a distance from it; if we apply to God in all our necessities, and willingly submit to what His providence shall order for us; why then, we are sure these are the fruits of the Spirit; that He abideth with us, and will be with us, while we continue to walk in *this* way.

On the other hand: if a man has cast off the fear of God; runs headlong into temptations; lives in the practice of known sins; is fond of every thing that may divert his thoughts from the care of his soul; why then, he may be sure of it, he is led by the devil, and is in the way of perdition.

Let us therefore not flatter ourselves in a concern of so great moment. A wicked life is a sure mark that men do not belong to God. The Apostle speaks plain to this purpose: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever does not righteousness is not of God." 1John 3.10.

In one word: if we would secure the friendship and fellowship of the Holy Ghost, we must listen to Him, and obey His godly motions; we must keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man. We must pray daily for His gracious assistance, and commit ourselves entirely to His guidance and blessing. And that we may not believe every spirit, we must still have an eye to the Word of God, established by miracles; by which we shall easily distinguish *His will* from the suggestions of our own corrupt hearts; we shall see the truth, be governed by it, and shall be secure from the fear of evil.

Now unto Him who sanctifies us, and to Jesus who has redeemed us, and to God our Creator, be all honour and glory for ever. *Amen.*

XI. SERMON XXIII.

CHRISTMAS, EPIPHANY, &c.

THE REASON AND THE EXTENT OF GOD'S LOVE IN SENDING HIS SON INTO THE WORLD, AND THE OBLIGATIONS THIS LOVE LAYS UPON CHRISTIANS.

O Deus, fons misericordiæ, illumina amore tuo oculos meos, ut charitatem tuam erga nos immensam ego ipse agnoscam, et gratiæ tuæ delicias adeo degustem, ut mirabilia tui amoris ex verbis meis reluceant, ut ego, et populus qui me audiunt, hoc amore impleti, omnia ea, quæ tibi displicent, abnegemus, et in imaginem tuam magis magisque transformemur. Concede hæc propter Jesum Christum amoris tui filium. Amen.

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1 John iv. 9.

See John 3. 16; 2 Cor. 5. 18.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him, [that is, *through faith in Him.*]

Every thoughtful man has two things much at heart: *how he may appease God,* and *how he may please Him.* First; how he may appease God; for every man for himself knows, that he has done many things to offend Him. Secondly; how he may live so as to *please God;* for we know by experience, that if men were left to their own inventions, they would take such ways to gain the favour of God, as would rather *provoke* His displeasure.

Now, God has made these two things known to us by Jesus Christ, whom He sent into the world for these very purposes,—*to reconcile us to God,* and *to make known to us the will of God;* that is, how we may live so as to please Him. Or, as Zacharias expresses both these blessings,

"That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies," (and which had made us enemies to God,) "might serve Him without fear," (because we serve Him as He has appointed us,) "in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." Luke 1. 74.

In this (saith St. John) was manifested "the love of God" (of God who did humble Himself to behold such a sinful generation of creatures) "*towards us;*" that is, the whole race of mankind, who had no reason to expect such a favour, or that God should send to visit them, except for their iniquities.

And yet, such was the love of God, that He sent—not an Angel, but—*His Son, His only begotten Son, His beloved Son,* into the world; that *we,* that is, the world to which He was sent; or, as St. John elsewhere expresseth it, all that believe John 3. 16. in Him *might have everlasting life;*—might be enabled to attain eternal life through faith in Him.

Every serious christian, who shall be convinced of this, will have reason to rejoice that God sent His Son into the world; and no reasonable body will blame him for it. But for people to rejoice they know not why; to be extremely pleased with the return of *this season* [Christmas], without knowing, and without valuing, the blessing of a Redeemer; this is what makes many thoughtful christians *sad,* when others are full *of mirth and jollity.*

To prevent this, I will set before you a short and plain account of these following things:

First; The reason of God's sending His Son into the world; namely, *that we might live through Him.*

Secondly; We shall consider the *extent* of God's love in sending His Son, *that we might live,*—that as many as believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Lastly; We shall consider, what obligations this love of God lays upon christians.

I. Let us first seriously consider, *The reasons of God's sending His Son into the world.* The text says, in general, that it was, *that we might live through Him;* that is, that we might not only escape those punishments of which our consciences were afraid; but also that we might be made happy beyond what we could either desire or deserve.

SERM. XXIII.

To give you a short, but plain account of this matter: you are to consider, *that God made man upright*, that is, holy like Himself; that while man continued so, he was happy, both in the favour of God, and in the peace of conscience which he enjoyed; but at last, through the malice of the devil, and the disobedience of Adam, sin entered into the world, which has been the occasion of all the mischiefs and miseries that we meet with, or hear of. Particularly, there is one most miserable effect of sin, that all mankind are sensible of, and that is, *the fear of punishment*. It being most natural for every man who knows he has done amiss, to expect to hear of it again. So that when the Psalmist saith, "My sorrow is continually before me; mine iniquities are gone over my head, and as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me;" he speaks not his own sense only, but the sense of every man living, whose conscience is awake, and under the guilt of sin.

[Eccles. 7. 29.]

[Ps. 38. 4.]

And this is the very true reason why all mankind, ever since the fall, have been seeking out the ways of appeasing God, and, if possible, of making their minds easy under the fears of His displeasure for the sins they had committed, and were daily liable to.

Now God, who foresaw all this disorder even before the fall, designed, from the beginning, to redeem man from this sad condition of blindness, fear, and uncertainty.

And first; Christ was promised to the fathers, to whom also the law was given, to the end that knowing their sin by the law, and how unable they were to keep that law which their consciences told them was *holy, just*, and *good;* they might with more impatience desire the coming of Christ. And because he was to be "a Light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as "the Glory of Israel," God sent Him at a time *when all iniquity did abound*, that men might see plainly that it was not for any works of theirs that He sent His Son into the world, but for His *goodness*, and for His truth's sake. And after men had sufficiently wearied themselves in seeking for peace and happiness, by ways of their own invention, and all to no manner of purpose; it was then that God sent His only Son into the world, *that men might live through Him;* that they might know how to live so as to please God, how

[Luke 2. 32.]

to appease God when they have offended Him, and how to secure His favour both here and hereafter: "In this the love of God was manifested."

In short, God's design being to recover man to a state of happiness, from which he fell by sin, there was no other way of restoring him to happiness, but by *holiness*.

The way God has taken to bring this about has been by sending His Son into the world, who being the *express image* [Heb. 1. 3.] of God, by Him we know *what God is*, and *what will please Him*.

By Him, for instance, we know *the exceeding great love of God towards men;* for God having from the beginning purposed to send His Son into the world, all the wickedness, all the provocations of men, could not divert His goodness and faithfulness from doing it.

By Him, we know that God is ready to forgive the greatest sinners upon their repentance, and return to their duty.

And whereas we are but too apt to fall, *by Him* we know that God is *able* and *ready* to support us by His grace; and that He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, provided we ask His help sincerely.

That men may not vainly depend upon the love of God without caring to deserve it, His Son has assured us, that God is *just* as well as *good*, and that He has *judgments* as well as *mercies* in store for such as shall deserve them.

And then, that we may certainly know *what will please God*, He has given us a very *few, plain* directions in His sermon on the mount, contained in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew. There we learn, in what *true happiness consists:* not in any thing the world is apt to doat on; not in the abundance which men possess; but in poverty of spirit; in a godly sorrow for our own sins, and for the sins of others; in meekness; in hungering and thirsting after righteousness; in mercy and loving-kindness; in purity of heart; in making peace; and in suffering for righteousness' sake.

And because He knew very well how hardly men would be brought to esteem these things, much less to strive after them, until they could be persuaded, that it is no great matter what a man's lot is in this world, provided he can but

SERM. XXIII.

please God; He therefore chose to be born of mean parents, in a mean place and condition. He had neither house nor harbour, and yet He never repined; teaching us that this is not the world where we are to look for happiness. And being pressed with the bitterest sufferings, He still submitted to the will of God, giving us a rule how to behave ourselves, when God suffers us to be afflicted. *Thus we live through Him;* that is, by His example we learn what will please God. And in this was manifested the love of God, in that He has suited this means of attaining happiness to the very meanest capacity.

It is not every body that can attain to any great measure of knowledge; but every body who hears the life of Christ, and believes Him to be sent from God, who sees the miracles He wrought, and the example He set His followers, must be convinced, that He was assisted by a divine power; that whatever He said was true; that whatever He promised was certain; and that whatever He did was worthy to be imitated.

From all which it appears, that the gracious God has dealt with us *as with reasonable creatures,* and has made use of the most plain and powerful arguments and motives to make us *holy,* that we may at last be happy. He sent not one to force a law upon His creatures by the sword and bloodshed, but He sent His only Son, with *works* sufficient to shew that He came from God; with offers of *pardon and grace* upon most merciful terms; with *power to forgive sins;* with *rewards and punishments;* requiring nothing of *us,* but what He Himself *in our nature* had performed and suffered, and what He would enable every faithful servant of His to undergo with *patience,* if not with *pleasure.*

By this time I hope you understand, that the design of the Gospel is to mend that disorder which sin has caused in the world. That this is to be done no other way, than by rooting it out, and establishing holiness in the room of it. That God sent His Son into the world for this very end, that is, to redeem us from death, *by redeeming us from our vain conversation.* [1Pet.1.18.] And that we ought to value the love of God by the price of our redemption. And we shall still have more reason to do so, when we consider, in the second place,

II. *The extent of this love of God, in sending His Son into*

the world. And indeed the Scriptures are very plain and express as to this matter: "God (saith St. John, iii. 17.) so loved the world, that He sent His Son, that the world through Him might be saved." And that God was no respecter of persons in thus loving the world, we are assured by the Apostle, His will is, that *all* men should be saved. 1 Tim. 2. 4. And St. Peter affirms, that even such as perish, through their own wilful disobedience, are of the number of those whom Jesus Christ came to save. "They denied the Lord that [2 Pet. 2. 1.] bought them;" that *bought,* and would have saved them, but they brought upon themselves destruction.

Nay, to take away all manner of scruple, and to apply this most comfortable truth to the consciences of sinners, who are apt to fear the worst, St. Paul speaks of this after a most convincing manner: As the sin of Adam (saith he) affected all Rom. 5. his posterity, as by one offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so the merits of Christ were designed to redeem *all* the posterity of Adam; for "by the righteousness of One, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." As sure therefore as I am one of those who by the sin of Adam are become weak, corrupt, and wicked, so sure am I redeemed by Jesus Christ. And the sin that does so easily beset me directs me to Him who came into the world to save me.

This was the doctrine of Christ, and this He taught by His example.

The very persons who crucified Him had an interest in the sufferings they made Him to undergo; otherwise He would not have prayed for them that God would forgive them. St. Stephen followed his Master's example, and prayed for his murderers. And the Church of Christ still continues to pray for *Jews, Turks, Infidels,* and *Heretics,* holding *this truth,*— that the love of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, extend to all men who will lay hold of the mercy; "That who- [John 3. 16.] ever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

And by this charitable practice, our Church endeavours to bring all her people to a godlike temper of charity and goodwill for all who bear the image of God; and by this practice she endeavours to support the spirits of dejected penitents,

SERM. XXIII.

who will have no reason to despair, since the greatest sinners are in a capacity of salvation.

We are obliged indeed to say, in a capacity to be saved; for the truth is, all men are not saved, that might be saved, if it were not for their own wilful blindness, resisting the love and the counsel of God for their good.

Many will not hear and be made sensible of the danger they are in; others will not forsake their sins for any consideration whatever; and many even despise the very offers of pardon and grace. In all these cases, the Saviour of the world declares, that it is men's own fault if they are not saved. "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life."

John 5. 40.

If people, when salvation is offered them, will notwithstanding unworthily abuse the mercy; if men, to whom God has manifested Himself, *will not* retain God in their knowledge; if those that have been enlightened, and have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; if they are again entangled therein, and are finally lost; this is not for want of means to be saved; but they will not be saved; they will not seriously attend to the word preached; they will not believe, at least they will not consider the importance of a judgment to come; nor will they submit to the conditions of attaining eternal happiness.

But then, it must not be said that God did not love them, that God did not desire their welfare, Who has declared His Son to be the Saviour, not of some few only, but of *the whole world*. And therefore the account of His birth is said by the angels, to be tidings of great joy *to all people;* that is, to all that can be prevailed upon, by the *goodness* of God, by the *love* of Christ, by the *labours* of His ministers, to receive Him for their Lord and Saviour.

[Luke2.10.]

And now we come, in the third and last particular, to consider,

III. *What obligations this love of God lays upon christians.* For certainly God did not design that all this love should be lost upon us. He expects some return, some fruits of His Son's *humiliations,* and *labours,* and *sufferings.*

Shall I put you in mind how God, by the Prophet Isaiah,

[ch. v.] reasoned with the people of Israel? "Judge (saith He), I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard." The case was so plain, that He refers it to themselves: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

Now the punishment of this ingratitude, this unfruitfulness, followeth: "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, trodden down, laid waste." And so it came to pass. You can any of you apply this as well as I.

To proceed, therefore: The love of God in sending His Son into the world obliges us to three things especially. 1*st.*; To love the Father, Who sent His Son that we might live through Him. 2*ndly*; To love our Lord Jesus Christ, Who condescended to come down to save us. And 3*rdly*; To love all mankind, for whose sakes, as well as for our's, He came down from heaven.

I. And first; *If God has shewn so great a love for us, we ought in return to love Him again.* But do we find that it is so with us? So far from it, that it is with pain and unwillingness that we think of His favours; it is with difficulty we ask His mercies; and it is seldom that we thank Him for them; and yet we say, *it is our duty to love Him with all our hearts.* We know we love a thousand things better, and yet we are easy.

But what must a man do who knows this to be his case? Why, he must lament the blindness, the perverseness of his nature, which will not suffer him to love the very Author of his being, and well-being. He must pray God to increase his love; and must endeavour to lessen his love for the world. In short, we must do what *we* can, and God by His grace will supply the rest. Give God thanks for the blessings you receive; submit patiently to all His dealings with you; resign yourself wholly to His good-will and pleasure; depend upon His word, upon His promises, upon His goodness; and your love to God will increase daily, and God will love *you* more and more, and will supply all your defects by the merits of His Son.

And that you may not be deceived, and think you love

SERM. XXIII.

God, when indeed you do not; remember, *that love and obedience always go together*. That where there is not a desire to please God, and a fear to offend Him, *there is no true love of God.*

II. *Our Lord Jesus Christ demands the next place in our love;* for it is only by Him that sinners have hope. It was
[Phil. 2. 7.] He, Who, though Lord of the whole creation, *took upon Him the form of a servant,* that He might set us an example of humility, the most acceptable grace of God, and that He might effectually convince us, that this is not the world we were made for, and that in truth it is dangerous to have to do with it.

It is He, Whose whole life, for our sakes, was made up of sufferings; that having borne all the infirmities of *our* nature, He might more affectionately pity and succour us, while we are in this vale of misery.

It was He, Who went about doing good; that He might, after the most sensible manner, shew us what was most pleasing to God.

[Heb. 1. 3.] By Him we know God, *for He is the express image of the Father*. We know that He is good to all; that His tender mercy is over all His works; that He desires not the ruin of His creatures; that He is long-suffering, of great pity; for so was His Son our Lord Christ.

And when no other sacrifice would atone for the sins of the world, it was on *Him* all our iniquities were laid; to Him we owe our redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins.

And lastly; it is this same Jesus, Whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to all that come to God by Him; for to Him the Father has committed all judgment. So that all our hopes of pardon, the acceptance of our prayers, the grace of God, the conquest of our enemies, all our comfort on earth, all our hopes of heaven, depend entirely upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and on what He has done for us. Well therefore might the Apostle say,
[1 Cor. 16. 22.] "That if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed."

III. And because *He gave Himself for the life of the world, we are therefore bound to love all mankind, because Jesus Christ*

did so; not in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth. And that we may be more effectually engaged to do so, God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth; and all these being become equally the children of wrath, He has redeemed them all *by one Saviour.* Shall *we* then think *any* unworthy of *our* love, whom God has thought worthy of *His?*

Let us have a care of making the same evil use of the favour of God, as we find the Jews did, who, because God called *them His own people,* could not imagine that He had any regard or concern for any other nation. And so narrow, so selfish a love had possessed that whole people, that when God sent His Apostles to, and poured His Spirit upon the Gentiles, they were amazed to find that God had granted repentance unto life to a people whom *they* had in their own thoughts given up to destruction.

Rather let us imitate the boundless goodness of God, Who has embraced the whole creation within the arms of His love. And our Lord Jesus Christ has made *love* the *badge* of all His faithful members, and by which they are known to belong to Him: not a *selfish love,* for such as think just as I do,—for such as will be governed by the reasons that prevail with me; —but charity is a tender regard for the whole creation of God, loving the persons of those whose errors I cannot close with; pitying the blindness, bearing with the perverseness, praying for the conversion of those that I suppose to be enemies to truth and virtue.

In short, we have this commandment from God, that "He who loveth God, love his brother also." 1John 4.21.

And these are the great obligations which the love of God lays upon all christians.

And now let me lay before you (in a few words) some useful observations upon what has been said upon this subject.

And first; when christians hear such Scriptures as these, "That God sent His Son into the world, that we might live through Him;" they are apt to mistake the meaning, and fancy that there is *now* no danger, since Jesus Christ has paid their ransom. Why, now, this is not to *magnify,* but to *abuse,* the grace of God. Christ hath indeed redeemed

SERM. XXIII.

us from the wrath to come; but then He must also redeem us from *all iniquity*, and "purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Titus 2. 14.

In one word: The life which Jesus Christ has purchased for us must be begun in this world. So that all our hopes, and happiness hereafter, depend upon our being made conformable to Christ in this life: "That our old man being crucified with Him, the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. That as Christ was raised from the dead, so we also should walk in newness of life;—that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness."

Rom. 6. 4, 6.

1 Pet. 2. 24.

You will observe, that our redemption is a work of mere grace. God sent His Son into the world, when there was nothing in us to move Him to it but only our misery. Whatever pretence mankind had to the favour of God before the fall, it was all forfeited; and this is the reason that the *free grace of God* is so much spoken of in the Gospel, that men may not arrogate any thing to themselves, but that we may be humble, and thankful, and obedient, to the Lord that bought us; that we may be concerned to please, and afraid to offend Him.

And to all that are thus affected with the goodness of God, resolving by His grace to live according to His Son's doctrine and example; to such, one would use our Saviour's words, "rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." But to such as rejoice they consider not why, the words of Solomon suit better their condition: "The end of that mirth is heaviness."

[Matt. 5. 12.]

[Prov. 14. 13.]

We shall conclude this discourse with what the Spirit hath said by St. Paul, to shew the great obligations we owe to God, in this dispensation of His mercy; who thus expresseth it, 1 Cor. i. 30: "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us *wisdom*, and *righteousness*, and *sanctification*, and *redemption*." He is our *wisdom*, by making known to us the will of God, and His glorious perfections; our *righteousness*, by satisfying in our nature the justice of God, and by restoring us to God's favour; our *sanctification*, by His Holy Spirit working in us true holiness, and by that separating us from an evil world; our *redemption* from the greatest of all slaveries, the slavery

of the devil, and the sins he tempts men to, and from a state of damnation.

O Jesus, for these mighty blessings, all love, and glory, and thanksgiving, be unto Thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, by us, and all that are partakers of these mighty favours.

SERMON XXIV.

THE NECESSITY OF LOVING JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOUR, PRINCE, AND LAW-GIVER; AND THE TRUE MARKS OF SUCH A LOVE.

1 Cor. xvi. 22.

See Matt. 10. 37; John 8. 42; 14. 15, 21, 24; Eph. 3. 17; 6. 24; Phil. 3. 8; 2Tim. 2. 12; 1John 2. 15.

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha; [that is, *accursed when the Lord cometh to judgment.*]

Saint Paul tells us, the verse before, that he wrote these words, and the salutation following, *with his own hand,* as a matter that it *concerned* them to take notice of. And, truly, it concerns all christians to have some good assurance of this, *that they do indeed love the Lord Jesus Christ,* lest, when He comes to judgment, they should fall under *this dreadful sentence,* to be for ever separated from their Lord and Saviour.

The words are *plain,* and *positive,* and *full* of *terror.* And I have made choice of them, that I may at once awaken your attention, and put us all upon a most necessary enquiry, *whether our love be such as it should be?* For it is very certain, people *may* deceive themselves, and hope that they are Christ's faithful servants, and that they shew their love sufficiently, either by endearing expressions, or by their zeal for their own particular way of serving Him, by standing up for the truths of the Gospel.

Now, though all these are worthy expressions of respect, yet they are by no means to be depended upon as infallible marks of our love to Jesus Christ, because there have been people, in all ages, who have gloried in the name of Christ,

have contended for the privileges of the Gospel, have spoken of Jesus Christ in words full of love and respect; and yet have been utter strangers to *that love*, which should have appeared in their *lives* as well as in their *professions*.

As for "such as deny the Lord that bought them," charity will not suffer us to believe that there are any such present. But then there are too many, who (as we said just now) are under a delusion without knowing it. 2 Pet. 2. 1.

First; There are many, for instance, who love Jesus Christ as He is *their Saviour*, who do *not* love Him as He is their *Prince* and *Lawgiver*.

Secondly; There are many who love Him, *but not heartily*, because they do not know their *own misery* without the blessing of a Redeemer.

Thirdly; There are many, very many, who hope that they may *love Jesus Christ*, without renouncing the *love of the world*.

Fourthly; There are too many, who, mistaking the marks of a love for Christ, misspend their time in vanity, and misplace their affections.

Lastly; It is impossible to love Jesus Christ as we should do, unless we obey His commands.

These, therefore, are things fit to be made plain, and these are the particulars, which, by the favour of God, I shall *now* insist upon.

I. We shall first consider *the delusion of those who love Jesus Christ as a Saviour, but do not love Him as He is their Prince and Lawgiver*.

When the love of Jesus Christ is first announced, people look upon it as a most *reasonable duty*, and the most *easy* to be received: they consider Him as a *Redeemer;* "that He came into the world to save sinners;" that by *His means* God is *reconciled to us*, for He laid down His life for us, and the *Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all;* that He is *our Advocate* with the Father, our *Great High Priest*, making intercession for us continually; that "we are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ;" "and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." 1 Tim. 1. 15. [Isa. 53. 6.] Gal. 3. 26. Rom. 8. 17.

These are all such glorious privileges, purchased for us by Christ, that it seems impossible for any christian not to love

SERM. XXIV.

Him. And we do not wonder that the Prophets, foreseeing His *incarnation* and appearance in the world, called Him *the desire of all nations;* that *all nations should call Him blessed;* that *all the families of the earth should be happy in Him.*

Hag. 2. 7. Ps. 72. 17. Gen. 28. 14.

But then we are apt to forget, that *this Saviour,* Whom we love and admire, is *our Prince and Lawgiver;* that we are His *subjects,* and bound to obey all His laws; that He is to be our Judge, and will call us to a very strict account, if we pretend to be His servants, to *love Him,* and *do not the things which He commands us.* And this makes a strange alteration in our affections; when we call to mind what our Redeemer expects from us; what strict laws this Prince has given for the good government of His subjects; and upon what conditions He will be a *Saviour* to us.

These thoughts are apt to lessen our joys, and we are almost ready to say, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, liii. 3, "there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him." And it is *then* we find *that* a matter of difficulty, which *before* we thought the easiest duty in the world. And indeed it is the hardest thing to flesh and blood to *love Him sincerely,* Who commands us, *for His sake,* to renounce all that is dear to us in this world; to deny one's self a great many things which we are very passionately fond of; to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection; not to conform ourselves according to this present evil world, for which we are *sure to be reproached;* and yet to esteem *this reproach* of Christ before all worldly advantages; to glory in nothing so much as in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we are taught to despise all that the world doats on.

These are the commands of Jesus Christ, concerning which, hear what our Saviour Himself saith: "Ye are My friends, ye are they that love Me, if ye do whatever I command you."

[John 15. 14.]

When, therefore, we read the history of our Lord's life with a sensible pleasure; when we admire at His wonderful humility in the manner of His birth; for the Son of the Highest to be born of a poor virgin, in an obscure town, in the worst part of that poor town; to live a private life; to want many of the conveniencies even of *such* a life; to see Him refuse to be made a king, content to be called an im-

postor, a dealer with the devil; suffering Himself to be betrayed, to be scorned, to be crucified; and all this to satisfy the justice of God for His sinful creatures, that had offended Him. No christian can hear these things without being sensibly affected.

But then, we should consider the meaning of this wonderful order of Providence; that it was to convince us, that this is not the world we were made for; that it is no great matter how poor we are born, how many things we want, how much we are despised, what severe things we suffer, provided we do our duty in that state of life in which the Providence of God has placed us; forasmuch as the happiness which God has prepared for them that love Him will make sufficient amends for whatever they want or suffer here.

To love Jesus Christ, therefore, is to love His *humility*, His *patience*, His *self-denial*, and to imitate them; and this will dispose us to love Him as our *Prince* and *Lawgiver;* to love His *commands*, and to *obey them* to the best of our power; without which all other instances and expressions of love will signify very little. "If ye love Me (saith Christ Himself), keep My commands." This is the end of all religion. [John 14. 15.]

We dedicate our children to Christ *in baptism*, that they may be bound betimes to keep His laws; they promise to do so themselves at *confirmation*. We renew these vows every time we receive the Lord's Supper; we pray to God in His name; we read His life, and remember His sayings; and *all this*, that we may be prevailed on *to keep His laws*. And we plainly delude ourselves, if we hope that any other expressions of our love will excuse us from *obeying His commands*. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven." [Matt. 7. 21.]

What! shall we say then, that there are but few that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and that the rest are *anathema?* We dare not pronounce this sentence: that must be left till the Lord comes to judgment. In the mean time, it nearly concerns us all to prevent that sentence, and to possess our hearts with such a love of Christ, as may at once affect our hearts, and influence our lives. To obtain *this*, it is necessary, above all things,

SERM. XXIV.

II. *That we be thoroughly convinced of our misery, without the blessing of a Redeemer.*

To be *born in sin*, and to be *the children of wrath;* this we are taught as soon as we can speak. But who considers the *meaning* of these words, even while we *feel* the sad effects of the sin of our first parents? The words of the text offer us an instance of our misery.

It is unquestionably true, that God made man to *love* and to *serve* Him. Our first parents before the fall did so undoubtedly; and it was their highest pleasure to *love* God and to *obey* Him. Do we find it *now* so with us? Very far from it. We think of Him with pain and difficulty; we obey Him unwillingly; we are backwards in asking His blessings, and we easily forget to thank Him for His favours; we boldly break His laws, and we are not sufficiently afraid when we have done so.

What a strange disorder is this! That a creature made to love and to depend upon God, should love every thing better than God; should find an uneasiness in God's presence; should take delight in such things as displease God; and should think it a burden even to ask a favour of Him!

This plainly shews, that men, by nature, do not love God; that they have lost the image of God, in which they were created; that God is angry with them; and that it is only for Christ's sake that ever He should be reconciled to them.

A man must be blind not to see that *this* is the condition of every man, and that it is a miserable one without the blessing of a Redeemer; especially if we consider, how much worse we have made our condition, by the many actual transgressions of our lives. So that we may truly say, in the words of Isaiah, lix. 2, "Our iniquities have separated betwixt us and our God, and our sins have hid His face from us." The consequence of which must be *shame*, and *sorrow*, and *fear*, lest we should be for ever miserable. And miserable we should have all been, had not Jesus Christ undertaken to redeem us. It is to Him we owe our redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins. "God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

1 John 4. 9.

Whoever lays these things to heart, and endeavours to

possess his soul with a sense of its misery, and with the love of Christ in reconciling us to God, will easily see the blessing of a Redeemer, and will have one of the strongest motives to love Him with all his heart. Our Lord would convince us of the truth of *this*, in that most affecting parable recorded by St. Luke: "There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Which of them will love him most? Certainly he to whom he forgave most." chap. 7. 41—43.

I shall conclude this particular with the observation of a very *learned* man[a], to this purpose: "Our Redemption being a work of as great mercy, *at least to us*, as was that of our creation, we could not but love our Redeemer even as much as God that made us. It was therefore absolutely necessary that God should redeem us, otherwise we should have been obliged to have loved a creature *equal* with God our Creator."

III. We come *now* to another delusion of christians, who hope that they may *love Jesus Christ well enough without renouncing the love of the world.* To prevent this, our Lord has expressly told us, "that no man can serve two masters:" and all thoughtful people have found it so by experience. For, if the love of the world rule in our hearts, the love of Christ will find little entertainment there. And we are required to love Him *with all our heart*, on *purpose* to cure us of an immoderate love for the world, which would otherwise take up all our *thoughts*, and *time*, and *affections*.

Was it not for this very reason, as was observed before, that our Lord made choice of a life of poverty, to convince the *poor*, that they are not ill dealt with; that they are free from a great many temptations, which would hinder them in their way to heaven?

Was it not to convince the *rich*, that they are in the midst of snares and dangers; that they have need of more grace to secure them from falling; and that the greatest satisfaction that this life can afford them will not make amends for the loss of heaven?

[a] Mr. Malebranch, in his Christian Dialogue, [Conversations Chretiennes. Cinquième Entretien. Tome Second, p. 221. Œuvres. 4to. Par. 1837.]

SERM. XXIV.

People are justly offended when they see a clergyman set his heart upon the world; and they conclude, truly, that such a man *cannot love the Lord with all his heart.* But then, they should consider, that the same affection for the world *in any other christian* will extinguish the love of Christ; and that all christians are equally bound to renounce the love of the world, who desire to love God as they should do.

In short, it is not for nothing that Jesus Christ has said so many severe things against riches, and the love of the world. It is because He knew how hard it is to be innocent in the midst of abundance; to enjoy the good things of this world without loving them too well; and how apt people that *have them* are, to *trust* in them, to *forget God,* and to set their hearts upon them. He has therefore assured us, that they are no mark of God's favour; that people may want them and be the happier for it; that such as have lost them may easily make up that loss, by securing a treasure in heaven; and that this is the use which they ought to make of such visitations of Providence.

I consider what people will say to all this. They will ask, for instance, who it is that does not love the world? It is a question that ought to be answered, because the Spirit of God says expressly, that the love of God and the world are inconsistent; and yet we are bound to live in the world, to take care of our families, and not to neglect our business.

A man therefore may live in the world, and may live like a christian, provided he avoids all things that are sinful, or the occasions of sin; and that he does not set his heart upon what he has, or labours for.

Our blessed Lord lived in the world, and complied with the laws and customs of the world; and *there was nothing singular in His life but His holiness.*

A good man, therefore, will not let the hurry of business so far gain upon him as to make him forget *that this is not the world he was made for.* If the world favours him, he will receive its favours with a fear and jealousy, lest he should be corrupted by them; he will not think himself one jot the better for these outward advantages, nor others the worse for wanting them; he will deny himself a great many things, which his circumstances might furnish him with; he will

be always ready to do good to such as are in misery; and by a temperance in all things will be ever prepared patiently to endure what the Providence of God shall order for him.

These are all Christian duties; and yet they would not be required of us, if it were not possible (by the grace of God) to perform them acceptably in the midst of worldly business. And the only fault is, when people forget that they are accountable to God; that they depend upon Him; that they are hastening to another world; and that their hearts should be there. And so they content themselves with some bare outward respects and testimonies of their love to God, with a form of godliness, without ever feeling the power thereof; and this they call a love for their Saviour.

IV. We shall therefore be obliged to consider, *what are the true marks of a sincere love for Jesus Christ?* Let us hear what our Saviour has said in answer to this question, John xiv. 15, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." And ver. 24, "He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings."

These words are so plain, that one would think here were no room for a mistake. What other meaning can they have but this: that obedience to the laws of the Gospel is the surest sign of our respect for Jesus Christ, and the only condition of favour with God? Upon which I cannot but make this *just observation:* that the great difficulties of a Christian life lie in *this,* in mortifying our corrupt affections, in weaning our hearts from the love of the world, and uniting them to Christ; not in knowing what our duty requires of us; for this is so plain, that *the wayfaring men, though never so simple,* [Is. 35. 8.] *cannot err therein.* Whereas christians, for the most part, contrary to all good sense, spend the most of their thoughts, and time, and pains, in getting still more knowledge; and look upon the *practice* of christianity as the easiest thing in the world.

This is a delusion which is found amongst all sorts of christians. The unlearned excuse themselves from a great many duties, on account of their ignorance. And the more learned do very often place religion in being able to say a great many things about it; and in the mean while, these plain truths are not taken notice of: *that the love of Christ is the shortest way of knowing our duty;* and *that*

SERM. XXIV.

the keeping His commands is the surest testimony of our love for Him.

If this were well considered, christians would be more concerned to avoid and to resist temptations; to pray often for grace to do their duty; to examine their hearts and their lives, and to amend where they have done amiss; and their knowledge would certainly increase with their obedience. So saith our Saviour verse 21st of this chapter: "He that loveth Me," that is, keepeth My commands, "shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and *manifest* Myself unto him."

To conclude, therefore, this particular: christians are not to judge of the sincerity of their love of Christ so much by the pleasure they take in knowing His laws, in admiring His goodness, in speaking well of His ways, as by the effect these produce. If we hate that sin which cost Him so dear; if we learn from His humility, His patience, His self-denial, to imitate Him, to set our affections on things above; if we read His Gospel with a sincere desire to know His will, and with a full purpose of heart to keep His saying; lastly, if we find that our love stirs us up to an honest discharge of the duties of our calling, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; why then, we have the witness in ourselves, that our love is such as it should be. But if it does not do *this*, it is no more than an *idle notion.*

But how shall we possess our hearts with such a sincere love? Why; that is what I would say in a few words. We must know that we want a Saviour; we must beg of God to give us an inward feeling of our own misery; we must live up to that measure of grace and knowledge which God has given us; we must consider who this Redeemer is, what He has done for us; that He has merited the pardon of our sins, if we repent and forsake them; that He is continually interceding for all those that come unto God by Him; and that the consequence of all this will be (if it is not our own faults), we shall be eternally happy.

I do not say that all this is to be done without care and pains, and a great deal of trouble. It is a difficult thing to possess our hearts with a sincere love of Christ; because we must first renounce all other affections contrary to the love

of our Saviour. But then, this convinces us of the truth of christianity, which requires of us such things as no man ever could come up to, unless assisted by a divine power. And if an infidel will say any thing against the Christian Religion, he must say one of these *two* things; either that there never was any man who lived up to his profession, which would be a bold saying indeed; or that God does bless and enable those that love and serve Him, to do His will.

In short; when we consider who it is that has redeemed us,—*no less a person than* THE SON OF GOD; what it is He requires of us; namely, to avoid such things as would make us for ever miserable; what favours He has purchased for us; namely, that He has made our peace with God, and has obtained for us a title to eternal happiness. If we consider His wonderful condescension in taking our nature upon Him; in submitting to all the hardships of a miserable life, and a more miserable death, in order to deliver us from death eternal. If, lastly, we consider, that we are commanded to honour the Son even as we honour the Father; that whatever we ask in His name, God will give us; that our present and future welfare depends upon His intercession with God for us. Whoever lays these things to heart will be convinced that Jesus Christ has indeed merited our love; that we cannot *think* of Him too highly; that we cannot *speak* of Him too worthily; that we cannot *worship* Him too reverently.

How unhappy then are those people, and how careful should all good christians be not to hearken to them, who would lead us to *think*, and to *speak*, and to *believe*, and to *act*, as if there was danger of loving their Lord *too much*, of honouring Him too highly, and of serving Him too religiously. Christians should beware of this, lest they should at last be tempted to deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

To conclude: it is no wonder, that there are persons to whom Jesus Christ and His Gospel are no way acceptable: it cannot possibly be otherwise. Can a man (for instance), who will not see his own misery, think that he has need of help? Can a man of pleasures love that Gospel which

SERM. XXIV.

bids him not love his pleasures upon pain of damnation? Can a man of the world think *that* a wise doctrine, which so often tells him, that those that trust in riches can hardly go to heaven; and that it is hard to have riches and not to trust in them? In short, can people heartily embrace a teacher, though come from God, who forbids them a thousand things which they are passionately fond of, and which they will have, let what will follow?

And was it not this that made Jesus Christ a stumbling-block to both Jews and Gentiles, when He first appeared in the flesh? They came to see and hear Him with their passions about them; and they could see nothing in Him worth admiring, besides the wonders that He wrought.

It is just so with all those at this day, who embrace a Saviour without resolving to leave their sins. They may speak of Him with respect, but it is impossible they should love Him. They may rejoice with His Church for company, but they will have no reason for it in the end. For this same Jesus, Who came to save us, and to deliver us *from the wrath to come*, must *first* deliver us from *all iniquity*; "from this present evil world; from our vain conversation." If we will not suffer Him to do this, instead of a Saviour, He will be our Judge to condemn us to eternal misery.

[1 Thess. 1. 10; Tit. 2. 14.] Gal. 1. 4. 1 Pet. 1. 18.

Now, the short of what has been said is this: Jesus Christ has merited our sincerest love. If we desire to love Him sincerely, we must endeavour to do what we believe will please Him. We cannot do this, without denying ourselves in many things which we are very fond of. We shall want an especial grace to do this; for of ourselves we are not able. To this end, Jesus Christ has obtained for us this *signal privilege*, that we may call God *Our Father*,—a favour which no people ever had before the coming of Christ. So that we may go to God with an assurance of being heard, as a child goes to his father.

If we make use of this privilege, and pray to God in the sincerity of our souls, and a sense of our misery, He will hear us, and, for His Son's sake, He will justify us, will change all our dispositions, and we shall love Him, and His Son Jesus Christ, as our only good and our portion for ever.

Now, unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. And "may grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." *Amen.*

Eph. 6. 24.

SERMON XXV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMOUR.

EPHES. vi. 10—19.

See 2 Cor. 3. 5; 1 Pet. 5. 1, 9; 1 John 5. 4; Epistle for 21st Sunday after Trinity.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel.

THERE are three things, which are the ruin of too many christians. *First;* A confident presuming upon their own strength. *Secondly;* An utter ignorance of the enemies they have to deal with. *Thirdly;* A wilful neglect of the means which God affords them for overcoming those enemies.

Christians have warning of these things given them betimes. One of the first things they are taught is, that of themselves they are not able to keep the commandments of

God, or to serve Him without His special grace. They have at their baptism renounced the devil, who is the declared enemy of God and of all good men; and they have been put into possession of the means of working out their salvation. And yet people perish, because they will not lay these things to heart.

The portion of Scripture which I have now read to you will be very proper to put you in mind of these things. You will see, in the first place, how necessary it is *to distrust ourselves,* as we hope to be safe. Then you will see what great reason we have to be upon our guard, upon account of the enemies we have to deal with. And lastly; you will see what provision our gracious God has made for our defence against all the assaults of our adversaries. These are *matters of great importance,* and I pray you will consider them along with me.

"Brethren (saith the Apostle), be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might;" that is, depend not upon yourselves, but on God's assistance, Who is mighty to save.

Learn, in the first place, to *distrust* yourselves; acknowledge your own poverty and weakness; renounce all pretence to wisdom, and self-government; and remember, that it is much better to be made sensible of our own frailty, by giving credit to God's Word (which tells us that of ourselves we are nothing), than to feel it sadly, by being permitted, by the just judgment of God, to fall into some *grievous, shameful,* or *destructive crime,* to convince us of the folly *of depending upon ourselves.*

In one word; men are naturally *proud, self-conceited,* have too good opinion of their own *reason,* of their own *resolutions,* and of their own *strength;* so that God is forced to leave them often to themselves, to make them see their error.

Was not this the case of St. Peter? Our Lord had told all His disciples, "without Me ye can do nothing." St. Peter, [John15.5.] forgetful of this, and finding himself disposed to stand by his Master even to death, confidently declares, "Though I should [Mark 14. 31.] die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee in anywise." And we all know how this ended.

And be assured, good christians, thus it will be with every man living, who shall trust in himself, and not in God alone.

SERM. XXV.

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." Get an entire confidence in God, by considering His *power*, His *wisdom*, and His *goodness*; that He knows all our weakness, and our wants; that nothing is impossible with God; and that He is so infinitely good, that He desires our happiness more than we ourselves do. He had compassion upon us, even when we were enemies and sinners; He has delivered us out of the kingdom and slavery of the devil, and put us under the government of His only Son our Lord Christ, who governs us by His *Laws* and by His *Spirit*, and will infallibly bring us to heaven, if, denying our own wills and desires, we depend upon the *goodness*, *grace*, and *power* of God, to defend us against our enemies. For, saith the text, "we wrestle not only against flesh and blood," that is, with men like ourselves, "but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

These are the enemies we have to wrestle with; namely, against the devil and his angels; who, in opposition to God, hath set up a kingdom in this world; whose subjects are wicked men and unbelievers, who, by the power of evil spirits, are kept in darkness, neither seeing nor fearing the danger they are in.

In which sad condition, and slavery, we and all mankind had continued to this day, had not the most high God set up a kingdom and power mightier than that of Satan,—even the kingdom of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ; Who hath called us out of darkness unto the light of the Gospel, and Who will enable all His faithful subjects and servants, to resist all the power of the enemy, to avoid his malice, and to overcome his forces. But then we must, as the Spirit directs us, "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand" (our ground) "against all the wiles of the devil;" especially "in the evil day," that is, in the time of *trial* and *temptation:* if *then* we want our *armour*, our *defence*, we shall certainly fall before our enemies.

What this armour is, the Apostle sets down very particularly in the following verses. And it behoves every christian to remember them, and to be provided with them, as he hopes for salvation. And they are, *Truth, Faith, Righteous-*

ness, Peace, Hope, and *Prayer.* These are called *the whole armour of God;* these being necessary for every christian who expects to overcome.

You must, in the first place, "have your loins girt about with truth;" that is, you must be fully persuaded of the truth of the Christian Religion which you profess; remembering, that the Gospel is God's *Word* and *Will,* given unto us by His *own Son,* Whom we are commanded to hear and obey by a voice from heaven, and Who confirmed His Gospel by the greatest miracles; by which you are instructed what you must do to inherit eternal life. It teaches you, for example, that you are to love God above all things, and to *shew* your love by keeping His commandments; that you are to love your neighbour as yourself; to do good to all; to forgive those that have injured you; to speak evil of no man; nor to defraud or wrong any body. It teaches you to set a true value upon your own soul, by assuring you, that the whole world ought not to tempt you to lose it; that sins of *impurity, rioting,* and *drunkenness,* will infallibly shut you out of heaven; and that such as are meek and humble, and fearful of offending, are in the way of salvation.

In short, this is the *Word of Truth,* which a christian ought to have always about him, as near his heart, as the very girdle about his loins. This is the rule by which he is to live, and by which he is to be judged; the very best armour he can have against errors of all kinds: for having this at hand, he will see, that he must not be led by the authority or customs of the world, nor be frightened by its terrors, by its reproaches, or scorns; he will see what is most to be *desired,* what most to be *feared,* what to be *avoided.* In one word; by consulting this Word of Truth, his heart will be firmly established against all the wiles of the devil, which would lead him to error and deceit.

II. The next *defence* of a christian is, *the breast-plate of righteousness;* that is, a conscientious discharge of all the duties of our calling, which, in the day of trial, will secure a christian from such assaults of Satan as tend to lead him to despair.

And indeed an *holy life* is of the same use to a christian, that a breast-plate is to a soldier to keep off blows in the day

SERM. XXV.

of battle. "For, though all our righteousnesses (as the Prophet speaks) are but as filthy rags," yet having the testimony of a sincere desire to please God, God for His Son's sake accepts of our work and our persons; and then the enemy is at a loss what to say against us.

Isa. 64. 6.

A christian will not say, I am *righteous*, and therefore I am *secure;* but he will say, I have lived in all good conscience, I have been *sincere* though I have not been *perfect;* and Satan himself knows, that God, for Christ's sake, will accept of *this* instead of a *perfect obedience*.

III. The next *provision* which a christian ought to make for his security is, *that his feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;* that is, that we walk in the practice of that *peaceableness* and *charity* recommended in the Gospel, which will make our Christian course more safe and less troublesome. For *as anger stirreth up strife*, and being indulged too long, or too much, will give place or opportunity to the devil to stir up adversaries against us; so *meekness* and *long-suffering* will preserve us from many temptations and persecutions, as did the soldiers' shoes of brass defend *them* from the gall-traps laid in their way to hinder their march.

[James 3. 17.] This is called "the wisdom which is from above," that is, from heaven; which teacheth us to be gentle in our behaviour, meek in our words, peaceable in our lives, *not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.*

[1 Pet. 3. 9.]

These are the arms of a christian. By these he is to overcome the adversaries of his soul; he is "to overcome evil with good; and, as much as in him lieth, live peaceably with all men." By which he will escape infinite temptations and dangers.

[Rom. 12. 18, 21.]

IV. But *above all the rest*, saith the text, *take the shield of faith*,—of faith in the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, *wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;* that is, render all the devil's attempts useless and of no force.

God has not left us to the uncertainty of our own reasonings, about things which concern our souls and eternity; but He has given us His Holy Word, and in that has declared,

what is truth, what is reasonable, what is necessary to be believed, what to be done, in order to our happiness. Fix then *this* in your heart, that *this* is God's Word, and that every syllable is true and will most certainly be made good; and this will defend you, as a shield, against the delusions of error, against the profane arguments of wicked men, against the snares of your own deceitful heart, and against the assaults of the devil.

For instance: if he shall at any time tempt you to *despair*, by suggesting how weak you are, and subject to sin, your faith will tell you (that is, God Himself tells you), that *His grace is sufficient;* that He who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead can raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. [2 Cor. 12. 9.]

If he would tempt you to *presumption*, your faith will tell you, what your Lord and Master said to His disciples: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do." And, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Luke 17. 10. 1 Cor. 10. 12.

If you are tempted to *sins of impurity*, your faith will tell you plainly, "That no whoremonger, nor unclean person, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven; but shall be cast into outer darkness, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Eph. 5. 5. [Mark 9. 44.]

If you are tempted to *fraud*, or *injustice*, or *oppression*, your rule will tell you, "That you must do violence to no man, nor defraud your brother in any matter; because the Lord is the avenger of all such." Luke 3. 14. 1 Thess. 4. 6.

If you are tempted to *covetousness*, you will remember the words and caution of Jesus Christ, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." And, "What will it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Luke 18. 24. Mark 8. 36.

If the devil would tempt you to *drunkenness* and *sensuality*, you have this plain caution given you, that if you live under the guilt of these sins, Christianity will be of no advantage; for the Christian Religion teacheth us, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Tit. 2. 12.

SERM. XXV.

If you are *poor*, and the devil would tempt you to *discontent*, to *envy*, or to *better your condition by unjust ways*; re-
Luke 6. 20, 21. member the words of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are ye poor, for your's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled." And that poor Lazarus, when
Heb. 13. 5. he died, was carried by the angels into Paradise, while the rich man went to hell, there to be tormented. Having food
Luke 16. 22. and raiment, be content therewith; for "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," saith the Lord Almighty.

Lastly; if the enemy of your soul would *cast a damp upon your spirits*, by suggesting that you cannot please God by all that you can do; why then support yourself by such
Heb. 6. 10. truths as *these:* that "God is not unrighteous;" that He has given us leave to call Him *Father;* that a *Father* will not cast off His children who desire to please Him, though
Rom. 8. 32. sometimes they do what they should not; and, that "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

V. To proceed: The next piece of spiritual armour is *the Hope of Salvation*, which will serve for an *helmet* or *head-piece*. And well it may; for what can discourage him whose
[2 Tim. 4. 7; 1 Pet. 5. 4.] hope is in the Lord of Hosts; "Who has laid up for them that fight the good fight of Faith, an immortal crown of glory that fadeth not away?"

In all our tribulations, therefore, let *us*, as Moses had,
Heb. 11. 26. "have respect unto the recompence of reward:" let us take
Heb. 12. 2. our Blessed Lord for an example, "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God."

VI. To these we must add, *the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God;* by which we shall be able rightly to judge betwixt good and evil, and defend ourselves against the stratagems of the devil, as our Lord did in the wilderness, Who, when He was tempted of Satan, still silenced him with a sentence of Scripture, which the tempter flew from as a coward would from the sword of a conqueror.

Lastly; To all these we must add *prayer, supplication,* and *perseverance* in these; by which we shall be able either to *prevent* or *remove* all the evils we are subject to, or have the grace to bear them with satisfaction or patience.

All the fore-mentioned graces are the gift of God; from *Him* we must ask them, and from *Him* we must receive them, if ever we have them. But then we must learn to ask them with the *humility* of creatures that know their wants; with the *reverence* of people who know their distance; and with the *earnestness* of christians who know they are undone unless their petitions are granted.

And whoever with these dispositions lays his wants before God, lamenting his own miseries, and earnestly begging the graces of God's Holy Spirit to support him in his Christian warfare, shall certainly find the good effect of his prayers. For, saith our Lord Christ, "if ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit" (and in that all good things) "to them that ask Him?" [Luke 11. 13.]

And now, good christians, having explained to you a portion of Scripture, which ought to be very well understood and remembered, I would desire you to consider, whether you can imagine, that Christianity is an idle state of life, or that any man can hope to get to heaven without *concern*, and *care*, and *pains*, and *striving*,—without taking the armour which God has provided for our security?

You see what enemies you have to deal with: *Satan*, a very malicious and powerful spirit; the *world*, a very deceitful, bewitching adversary; and lastly, an *heart* desperately corrupt and wicked.

Verily, if our gracious God had not pitied our condition, and had not provided us with suitable security against such enemies, not one man living could have been saved. Shall we then, because God has been careful of us, be careless of ourselves? Shall we live as if there were no danger, because God has provided us with arms to oppose our enemies?

Believe it, good christians, it is not for nothing that the Apostle exhorts us "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." [Phil. 2. 12.]

Whoever would continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end, and inherit eternal life after death, must *watch*, and *pray*, and *believe*, and *hope*, and *strive*, and *patiently endure* hardships, or his Christian profession will signify very little to him at the last.

SERM. XXV.

It is not sufficient "to renounce the devil and all his works;" to profess to believe in God, and to promise to serve Him all our days; unless in good earnest we do so, and become christians in *deed* as well as in *name,* with which too many, God knows, content themselves.

Let me therefore set before you the *character of a true christian*—one who is in the way of salvation; that every one of us may see how far we come short of it, that we may amend what is amiss in us.

A *true christian* then is one whom the Spirit of God has awakened into *a deep sense of his own misery;* who can have no rest, until he knows *what he must do to be saved;* and being convinced that he must pass through a *corrupt world, infinite errors, and powerful enemies,* in his way to heaven, his heart is filled with a godly *fear,* and *distrust* of himself, (knowing, by sad experience, his own weakness,) till at last he finds he *must* perish, unless God assist him with means of overcoming his enemies. He sets himself therefore in good earnest *to know the will of God;* that is, by what means God will enable a *poor, weak, sinful creature* to get the better of so many adversaries, which he is sure to meet with in his way to happiness. And having learned, that the Gospel is the rule by which we must live, because by *it* we must be judged; that a firm *faith* in the power of God for overcoming of all difficulties; that a lively *hope* in His promises; that a sincere endeavour after *righteousness,* and a *peaceable behaviour* towards all men; that these are the means which God has ordained for our safety; he therefore labours, with all his might, *to put his whole confidence in God,* never presuming upon his own strength; to have always in his eye the prize of his high calling; to order his life according to the rules of the Gospel; and, as much as may be, to be at peace with all his fellow-travellers.

These are a *christian's defence;* with these he conquers his enemies, and with these he grows every day *stronger in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*

But then, to *preserve* and to *increase* his faith and other graces, he diligently reads or hears God's Word (for faith comes by hearing); he earnestly prays God to increase his *faith,* his *hope,* and his *charity;* he keeps a careful watch

(like a good soldier of Jesus Christ) over his appetites and passions, that Satan may not get an advantage over him; and by this means, and the aids of God's Spirit, he is secure from fear of evil.

And be assured, good christians, that it is well worth your while to be at this pains, whether you consider the happiness you shall attain, or the miseries you shall escape. *Heaven* and *Hell* are words in every body's mouth, while few lay it to heart what is meant by the one or the other. But one or the other of these two must be the portion of every man; so that it mightily concerns every man to look to it, lest that be his portion which he least thinks of.

Now, God having mercifully furnished us with means of securing us against the worst that can happen, our duty and interest is, to make use of those means with the *seriousness* of people that hope to be saved; with the *concern* of people that see their danger among so many temptations; with the *cheerfulness* of people who hope for eternal happiness; and lastly, with the *courage* of christians who have the Almighty for their helper.

By this, good christians, we may, any of us, make a judgment of ourselves, whether we are in the way of salvation or not. If in truth we are, why then the care of our souls will take up much of our thoughts, and put us upon ways, and resolutions, and contrivances, for doing what we know is necessary for our eternal welfare. If, on the other hand, our hearts are full of the world, and all our thoughts and endeavours tend that way, why then depend upon it, we are not in the way of life, and we ought not to be easy under such circumstances.

And since we are encompassed on every side with dangers, and exposed to temptations both from within and from without, let us not depend on our own strength, but beg continually of God to keep us resolute and constant to the vows that are upon us: and then God will increase our *faith*, our *hope*, our *confidence*, and all other graces, which are necessary to bring us to heaven; whither the good Lord bring us all, through Jesus Christ, &c.

SERMON XXVI.

THE NECESSITY OF COMING TO SOME CERTAINTY WHETHER WE ARE IN THE WAY OF SALVATION OR NOT.

O Holy Spirit of Grace; I implore Thy assistance, that I may speak upon this important subject, so as to be understood, so as to touch the heart, so as to edify those that shall hear me. And grant that I may never forget to try and examine my own faith by those marks which I propose to others; and that I may be an example in faith and life; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

2 Cor. xiii. 5.

See Matt. 7. 21, 22; John 14. 1; Acts 23. 1; Rom. 8. 16; 2 Cor. 5. 7; Gal. 6. 3, 4; 2 Tim. 2. 19; James 2. 17; 1 John 3. 21.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; [that is, *Whether ye be true christians, and in the way of salvation; whether your lives be according to your profession.*]

My Christian brethren, I am going to lay before you the absolute necessity, as we hope for heaven, of coming to some certainty, whether we are in the way of salvation or not.

Every body must own, that it is a matter of great concern for a man to know, whether his faith is such as it should be; such as will please God; such as will influence our lives, and fit us for heaven. I need not therefore use many words to prevail with you to attend very seriously to what you are going to hear.

One cannot, in charity, but conclude, that any one of you would part with his life, sooner than he would renounce his faith and his Christianity. This being the general persuasion of all christians, that whoever renounces his faith, renounces all hopes of salvation. And so indeed he does. We have the word of the Son of God for it: *He that believeth not shall be damned.* [Mark 16. 16.]

But then let us have a great care of deluding ourselves, by fancying, that because we would not for all the world renounce our Christianity, that therefore we are such christians as we should be. For he only is a true christian, who believes as he should do, and leads a life agreeable to his faith.

Now, this ought to put every one of us upon examining ourselves, in very good earnest, *whether we be in the faith;* that is, in other words, whether we be christians in *deed* and in *truth,* as well as in *name?* By doing this, we shall either have the comfort of knowing that we are in the way of happiness; or else we shall see our danger, which, through the grace of God, may awaken us, and put us upon a new course of life.

In order to this, we need not examine into the many disputes among christians, to settle our faith and our religion. We have a rule of faith, which will infallibly lead us to heaven and happiness, if our life be but answerable to our Creed. But that which I would propose to you, is a much surer way of knowing whether you are sound in the faith; that is, by examining, *whether your life and conversation be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ?* [Phil.1.27.]

If a man's life is bad, his faith cannot be such as it should be; if a man's life is truly Christian, it is a good sign that his faith is so too; that therefore which I would most earnestly press upon you, and which I would charge myself with, is this: *First;* to examine every man himself, and consider the great truths which we know, and profess to believe. And *secondly,* to examine very particularly what effect *this faith* has upon our lives.

To begin with what we know and believe *concerning ourselves;* that is, that we are a race of sinful creatures, sadly fallen from the condition in which we were *most certainly* at first created; that we have within us the seed of every sin whatever; that we are prone to evil continually; that we are *by nature the children of wrath;* and that, as such, God can take no pleasure in us. [Eph. 2. 3.]

Will it not be expected, that every one, who knows and believes this, should be very humble, and very thankful to God, who did not overlook lost mankind when they had brought themselves into this sad condition?

SERM. XXVI.

In the next place, we profess to believe, that we are in this life *in a state of trial*, in order to mend our corrupt nature, that we may be capable of *that happiness* for which God at first created us.

Will any christian, who professeth to believe this, and that he is utterly unfit for heaven until his nature be mended, will he, notwithstanding, sit still, and be unconcerned, and lose this time of trial, and defeat the gracious designs of God, and live only to make his condition worse, by contracting evil habits, and offending his Maker continually?

Every christian *must see*, that such a belief, and such a life, are most hateful to God; and that such a christian (if he will call himself a christian) is in a much worse condition than the most abandoned heathen.

We all believe, and know for certain, that all mankind are under the righteous sentence of death; that this sentence is sure to be executed, but at a time we know not of; and that, when we die, we shall either be very happy or very miserable for ever and ever.

Now, will any christian, who professeth in earnest to believe this, live as if he were never to die; or will he think it best to endeavour to lose the remembrance of death, and of what must follow, by diverting himself with other fooleries, by the hurry of business, or by bewitching pleasures?

Is this the behaviour of thoughtful people? Very far from it. You will be convinced it is not, if you will go and see a serious christian labouring under any mortal ailment, which he is sure will put an end to his life in a month's time, or perhaps sooner: you will find such a man very serious, very indifferent for all the profits or pleasures this world can afford him; resolving to do every thing that may recommend him to the favour of God, whenever he shall die; and you would count him worse than a madman, if you should find him otherways disposed; if you should find him under no concern for his soul, but by all manner of ways diverting his thoughts from what is sure to befal him, whether he thinks of it or not.

And yet the generality of christians will not consider, that this is their own case. They *believe*, they *know*, they *are sure*, they must die, and sooner perhaps than they imagine.

The Gospel, which they say they believe, tells them what *for certain* must follow; either eternal happiness, if they have led good lives, or eternal misery, if they die unconverted: and yet they put the thoughts of death far from them, because they will not prepare for it; at the same time they would die with fear, if they did not hope to be saved.

But be assured of it, christians, that no man must flatter himself with these hopes. He only who is convinced of his own misery and danger, through the corruption of his nature, and understanding, by his Christian faith, the way to get out of this sad condition; he only who can sincerely resolve—I *must* not, I *dare* not, I *will* not, be any longer indifferent how I lead my life; I will, through the grace of God, live by faith; I will endeavour to know what God requires me to do, what I may hope for, if I strive to please Him, and what I am to fear, if I continue to provoke Him by my sins.

Every christian, who thus believes, resolves, and lives accordingly, is in the way of salvation.

We come now to consider what we believe *concerning* God, that we may know whether our faith is such as it should be.

We believe that God is infinitely great and good; and that we stand indebted to Him for every thing we *have*, or *value*, or *hope for*.

Now, let us consider, if we were half so much obliged to any man on earth, how highly should we value him; how dearly should we love him; how much should we think of him; how should we strive to please him; and how should we be troubled, when we should be so unhappy as to offend him? Why now, christians, if you thus *believe*, if you thus *value*, if you thus *love*, and *desire to please* God, and are careful not to offend Him, your *faith* hath its saving fruits; it is such as it should be.

To proceed: You believe of God, that He is *most holy;* and that as such He cannot but be displeased with every thing that is impure or wicked. Fix this truth in your heart; and your faith will keep you at the greatest distance from all sins of impurity and uncleanness, and from all temptations that lead to them; especially when the same faith assures you, that such sins, if not bitterly repented of,

SERM. XXVI.

will not only shut you out of heaven, but will cause you to have your portion with unclean devils.

You profess to believe, that God is *infinitely just*, and that He hates all *injustice*, *oppression*, and *wrong*. Now, if you really believe this of God, you will never suffer yourself to be led, through *covetousness*, *malice*, or *revenge*, to injure any man living.

We all profess to believe, that God sees every thing that passes in the world; that the very thoughts of our hearts, our most secret designs, are known to Him; and ought not every christian who believes this, to *live* and *act* as having God the constant witness of his conduct?

Lastly; we have the liberty, through faith, to call, to apply to, this *great*, this *good*, this *just*, this *holy* God, as to a *Father*. A most glorious privilege this, provided we live so as becomes the dutiful children of so *good*, so *great*, so *holy* a Father; provided we resolve, with those mentioned in the Book of Wisdom, [ch. xv. 2.] "We will not sin, knowing that we are accounted Thine." And are we not under the greatest obligations to do so, when, by our own confession, He can reward or punish men beyond what they can conceive?

So that if our faith in God be such as it should be, we should part with any thing, as dear as a *right hand* or a *right eye*, rather than displease, rather than provoke, this *great*, and *good*, and *holy* God.

We now come to examine *our faith in* JESUS CHRIST; that we may see whether our faith be right, by the fruits it produceth.

We profess to believe what Jesus Christ has made known
John 14. 6. to us, "That no man can come unto God, but by Him;" *He being* THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIFE; that is, the author of the *Way*, the teacher of the *Truth*, and the giver of
John 17. 2. *Life*. "That God has given him power over all flesh." That,
[John14.1.] therefore, *as we believe in God, we must believe also in Him*. For, that it would be but an uncomfortable article of faith, for a sinner to believe in a God who is holy, just, and powerful, and who hateth all iniquity, if he did not know how to make his peace with Him.

We believe, therefore, in Jesus Christ, who took our na-

ture upon Him, and has made our peace with God, by suffering, in our stead, what we for our sins had deserved. He has also prevailed with God to accept of our repentance, if sincere; to give us all necessary assistance to do our duty, and to accept of our best endeavours (instead of a perfect obedience), in order to our being made eternally happy.

Let us now examine our faith upon this article of our Creed; let us consider how our hearts and lives are affected with this exceeding great love of Christ for His poor creatures. Does this love of Christ, as the Apostle speaks, does this love of Christ constrain us? Does it constrain us to consecrate our lives to Him, Who, by His death, has redeemed us from death eternal? Does our love for Christ constrain us to take Him for our *Pattern*, for our *Lord*, our *Master*, and *Teacher?* If it does, we shall receive His Gospel as the Word of our salvation; we shall observe the *laws*, the *rules*, the *ordinances*, which He has given us, as the only means to secure us from perdition. Does our faith, as the same Apostle speaks, work by love? Does it appear by works of love and charity? Does the love of Christ constrain us to imitate His sufferings, to take up the cross daily, and follow Him as He requires us to do; that is, to deny our corrupt inclinations; to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to resist all inclinations to sin; and to subject our will to the will of God, by stedfastly purposing to do whatever we believe will please Him? Does the love of Christ, and what He has done and suffered for us, constrain us, not to be ashamed of *Him*, His *word*, His *humility*, and *sufferings*, in this untoward, unbelieving generation; nor to set a greater value upon the opinion and friendship of men, than upon the friendship of God and Christ? Will our faith and love constrain us to confess Jesus Christ, to follow His precepts and example, and to suffer for His sake, and to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, even before those that despise it?

2 Cor. 5. 14.

Gal. 5. 6.

Luke 9. 23.

[Mark 8. 38.]

Let us ask ourselves again, will our love of Christ, and our faith, constrain us, with Moses, to look upon the riches, pleasures, and idols of this world, as nothing, in regard of the recompence of reward which Christ hath purchased for us; or, with St. Paul, to count them but loss that we may

Heb. 11. 26.

[Phil. 3. 8.]

SERM. XXVI.

win Christ? Do we, by faith, set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth? Is our conversation such as becomes the Gospel of Christ?

Phil. 1. 27.

If we find, upon examination, that we do indeed love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the laws which He has given us, then we may depend upon it, that we are within the covenant of grace, [mentioned Heb. viii. 10.] by which God has engaged to put His law in our minds, and write it in our hearts, to give us a new heart, and a new spirit.

If the knowledge and belief of these things do not affect our hearts and our lives, it is a sign our faith is not such as it should be, and that our salvation is not much regarded by us. A too sure sign of this is, when we see christians turning their backs upon that very ordinance, whenever it is administered, which Jesus Christ Himself appointed on purpose to keep up the remembrance of what He has done and suffered for us; that our own death, whenever it shall happen, may be a comfort to us, and when nothing in this world, nothing but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, can support or comfort our dying spirit.

What we believe concerning the Holy Ghost, to whom, with the Father and the Son, we are dedicated in baptism, is this: That He is the cause of all that holiness in christians, which must fit them for heaven and happiness. And that, as we hope for these, we are every day of our lives to pray for His gracious assistance, His guidance, and blessing. And this we are to do in a more especial manner, that we may continue true members of the Church of Christ; as becomes members of so holy a society; that believing the *forgiveness of sins*, we may never despair of mercy, having so powerful an advocate as Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost to assist us to perfect our repentance. That being by the same Holy Spirit assured of a *Resurrection*, we may never forget, that we shall come forth from the grave just as we go into it, either objects of God's wrath or of His mercy.

How shall we know that we believe these truths as we ought to do; that our faith is such as will save us? why, as we know a tree,—by its fruits.

We profess to believe that our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. No man of common sense will *abuse*, or *pro-*

fane, or *defile* a church, because he considers it to be a place dedicated to the honour of God. Now, our bodies are more the temples of God, than our churches; they are consecrated to God, to His glory and service, in baptism. And if after this we defile them, by *uncleanness,* by *intemperance,* or by any other base or filthy use, the Holy Ghost will forsake them, and we shall become the temples of Satan.

A christian, who lives by faith, will make a better use of this temple of the Holy Ghost; he will, in his heart, apply to Him upon all occasions, and beg of Him to increase his graces; to shew him the way in which he should go; to defend him against his spiritual enemies; to make him every day more holy; that he may be capable of being more happy when he dies. He will beg this Holy Spirit to give him a love for, and an understanding of, those Holy Scriptures, which He Himself caused to be written for our comfort and salvation. He will beg of Him to preserve him a true and living member of that Holy Church, out of which, in the ordinary way of providence, there is no salvation. He will give Him hearty thanks that He has made him a member of that holy society, where there is a communication of all good things; where we have a share of all the prayers and blessings which God vouchsafes to His Church throughout the whole world. And because he is sensible of his daily sins and failings, he will pray for the forgiveness of his sins every time he is sensible that he has done amiss. And knowing assuredly, that the same Spirit, which raised up Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead, will raise up our mortal bodies; he will most earnestly and often beg that good Spirit, that he may lead such an holy life, as that he may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory.

These are the truths which we profess to believe. That we may not deceive ourselves, let us examine our faith by the fruits it produceth in the ordinary duties of life.

Now, christians are represented in Scripture, as a people who by faith know God, and the duty they owe to Him, as well as the duty they owe to themselves and others, which are all very plainly set down in Scripture. It is impossible to consider this, without some melancholy reflections, when one sees too many as ignorant of these things, and as little

SERM. XXVI.

concerned to know them, as if nothing depended upon them.

When one sees people praying for the pardon of their sins, for grace to amend their lives, for deliverance from eternal misery, and for the joys of heaven, with the indifference of people who are not much concerned whether their prayers are heard or not; when one sees them as fond of the world as if they were sure never to leave it; or that God had no better inheritance to give them hereafter. Such christians, to be sure, do not live by faith, nor think that they are in the way of ruin.

Every christian who lives by faith must be able to say, I will not, *by the grace of God,* live in any known sin whatever; I will not be careless or indifferent how I lead my life, how I spend my time, how I spend my estate; I will not dishonour God, or my Christian profession, by an idle, useless life; in all my dealings with others, I will set this command of God before my eyes, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;* because I know and believe, that this is one of those two commands on which my salvation depends. I will not, therefore, want to be compelled to give every man his due, or not to hurt my neighbour. I will (will every faithful christian say), I will make conscience of doing the least wrong; of using any deceit or fraud; or of taking advantage of the ignorance or necessities of others. If I have done wrong to any man, I will make him restitution; and, as for such as are my enemies, I will forgive, and give, and love, as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ.

[Matt. 22. 39.]

As to the duty which I owe to myself, I will consider, that the first and great duty is, to take care of my soul; I will therefore (saith a christian who lives by faith), I will take especial care to mind those rules of the Gospel, which are absolutely necessary to fit me for heaven. Such are, *self-denial, patience, humility, purity,* and *charity,* how much soever they are neglected by the generality of christians, as if they were no longer Christian duties. And as I pray daily that God's will may be done; for myself, I will endeavour to resign my will to the will of God in all the dispensations of His providence. And, forasmuch as the promise of seeing God is made to the pure in heart, I will endeavour to keep my heart

[Matt. 5. 8.]

from every thing that may defile my soul, and grieve that Holy Spirit by which I have been sealed unto the day of redemption. Lastly (will every faithful christian say), I will keep a watch over myself, that I may not resist or forget those good purposes which the good Spirit of God puts into my heart.

Such a faith, and such a life as this it is, christians, that must recommend us to the favour of God; and to be easy in our minds upon any other terms, is to be in the way of perdition without knowing it. These things we must do, or give up our hope of heaven. For, as sure as God is true, and His word certain, none must go to heaven but the *good*, the *devout*, the *piously-disposed*, the *obedient*, the *sober*, the *chaste*, the *just*, the *honest*, the *religious* christian.

Let us not then, my Christian brethren, let us not content ourselves with the bare name of christians, and with shadows of religion and piety, without striving after that holiness without which no man must see the Lord.

You see plainly, that to be a christian, and a true christian, are two very different things. A true christian, knowing that the want of a lively faith is the occasion of all the wickedness we meet with in the world, therefore begs this grace of God with all the earnestness of his soul; he studies, he attends to, the truths of the Gospel, as that which must make him wise unto salvation; he resolves, that what he learns there he will believe, let what will be said against it; that what it requires, he will observe and follow, and avoid what it forbids; never consulting the way of the world, its customs, its favours, or its frowns. By doing which, he secures the favour of God, His grace here, and happiness hereafter.

On the other hand, they that live at all adventures, in a general forgetfulness of God, of their duty, and religion, without feeling anything of its power; such people, under the name of christians, are in truth unbelievers; and as such will be rejected of God, and will be reserved for a punishment dreadful to be named, however little they consider and think of it.

In short; God has given us a law by which He will judge us. By *faith* we receive this law; and by this we are to

SERM. XXVI.

judge what our condition is like to be hereafter, whether happy or miserable.

That we may make this judgment impartially, let us consider what our thoughts will probably be, when we come to die. Whether, for instance, we shall not be under a most terrible astonishment, when, reflecting upon our faith, and comparing it with our past life, it shall appear that we have lived in a plain neglect of what we profess to believe, and what we knew to be our duty. Or whether, upon comparing our life and our faith, we shall have the comfort of having lived by faith, repented of our errors, made our peace with God, and lived to bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

One of these two will be the case of myself, and of all you that hear me; how soon we know not; but it highly con-
[John 9. 4.] cerns us to think of it, lest the night come when no man can work, before we have finished the work we have to do.

My design, you see, christians, has been to put you upon considering and examining into the truth of your faith, and the state of your souls. By the short hints which, for the sake of your memory, I am going to give you, you will see who *is*, and who is *not* in the way of life and salvation.

All such as fear God, and are afraid for themselves, on account of the corruption of their nature; such as are truly sorry for having offended so gracious a God and Father, and resolve to do so no more; such as receive Jesus Christ as their Lawgiver, Saviour, and Judge; such as strive to be holy in their lives, as God who hath called them is holy; such as do watch, and purpose in their hearts to do nothing knowingly which may displease God; these have the principles of grace and life in them, and are in the way of life everlasting.

While such as are wilfully ignorant of God and of the principles and duties of christianity; such as are not sensible of the corruption of their nature, and the danger they are in on that account; such as see not, nor are sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer; such as are best pleased with such company and pleasures as divert the thoughts of what must come hereafter; such as live under the means of grace, without being bettered by them, whose hearts are set upon the world and its idols: all these are in the way of certain ruin,

though they will not think of it, though they will not believe it.

From all which it appears, how christians are to judge of the truth and sincerity of their faith, even by the manner of their lives.

If a man fears God, he will be afraid to do any thing which he believes God has forbidden him; if he loves God, he will desire to please God; if he believes God to be the fountain and giver of all good, he will pray to Him for all the good he wants and desires; if he believes that God ordereth all things with infinite wisdom and goodness, he will be pleased with all God's choices for himself and others.

Let no man, therefore, flatter himself that he is a christian, who does not do the things which Christ has commanded, and who will not learn from the example, from the meekness, humility, patience, and self-denial of Jesus Christ; he who will not be persuaded that this is the only way to be restored to the favour of God, can neither be happy in this world nor in the world to come.

To conclude all that I have to say upon this subject:—As christians, we have the greatest obligations upon us to lead very serious, very holy lives. We are blessed with the true knowledge of God; we have His own Son for our *Master*, and *Teacher*, and *Protector*, and *Saviour*, and *Mediator*, and *Advocate;* we are received into His family by baptism; we have the Holy Ghost to assist us, and an interest in all the prayers made in His Holy Church throughout the world; we know and believe that we shall rise again (if we have passed this life of trial as we know we ought to do);—we shall rise to enjoy a life of happiness unspeakable and everlasting.

What can our hearts wish for, what can we desire more? Yes, O Jesus, this one thing we desire and beg, that we may all have the grace which Thou alone canst obtain for us, that we may have grace, to lay the things which we believe most seriously to heart, and that our lives may be answerable to our faith.

Grant this, O Lord, for Thy mercy's sake, and for the sake of Thy poor creatures, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood; that we may give to Thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, glory, and honour, and praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXVII.

THE GREAT DUTY OF WORSHIPPING GOD.

REV. iv. 10, 11.

See Ps. 19. 1; 95. 6.

The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, (that is, before God,) *and worship Him that liveth for ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created.*

HERE is, good christians, *an heavenly pattern* set before you: here is the manner how the blessed inhabitants of heaven behave themselves in the presence of God. They fall down before Him with all humility, *even they that wear crowns;* and, in token of the great difference there is betwixt God and the greatest of His creatures, "they cast their crowns before His throne;" acknowledging that he only is worthy to receive *glory,* and *honour,* and *power;* for it is He who has made all things, and it is by His will and pleasure alone that they continue in being. From all which we are to learn two things especially:

First; That whenever we come into God's house, *which is His presence,* we are (*after this heavenly pattern*) to express our reverence for God after the most becoming manner.

Secondly; That we should take notice of, and consider, the *wisdom,* and *greatness,* and *goodness* of God in the works of the creation; and then we shall be convinced, that He is worthy of all the duty and reverence that we can possibly pay Him.

I. The first thing we are to learn from these words is this, *that whenever we come into God's house* (which is His presence),

we are to express our reverence for God after the most becoming manner.

And first; "Though God" (as the Apostle saith) "dwelleth not in temples made with hands;" though the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; though a man may be sure to be heard wherever he prays to God in the sincerity of his heart; yet there are some places in which God is said to be present in an *especial manner*. Thus, for instance, the Temple was called *the house of God, a house of prayer;* that is, the place where men were to offer their prayers and thanksgivings. And, God is said to record His name in all such places as are regularly dedicated to His more immediate service; and promises to meet His people there, and bless them; "Mine eyes and Mine heart" (saith God), "shall be there perpetually."

Acts 7. 48.

[Is. 56. 7; Matt. 21. 13.]

Exod. 20. 24; 29. 42. 1 Kings 9. 3.

So that you see how foolishly people speak, when they say, that they can pray as well at home as in the church; that they can read a sermon as well themselves as go to hear one.

But are they sure that God will hear the prayers that are offered to Him in contempt of His holy ordinances? Are they sure that God will give His blessing to what they read at home, when they despise *His* house, *His* service, and *His* ministers. And if the holy angels of God, which are our guardians, are in the house of God attending upon the faithful while they are at their devotions, in what a condition are all such as are absent without reason? Why, in truth, they are very much exposed to the malice and attempts of the devil, who is continually wandering about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; that is, whom he may be permitted to devour, having no good angel to protect them.

In short; the church is the house of God, the gate of heaven; the place where God will hear His people's causes and complaints; the place where He dispenses His blessings in greatest abundance; the place where *His* ministers attend to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, to pray for all. So that all who expect God's mercy and blessing ought to go to God's house. But then, as they hope for His blessing, *they ought to behave themselves in His presence with respect and reverence.*

When we are to go before our betters, we very naturally

SERM. XXVII.

consider how we may do it after a handsome manner, for fear of provoking them to anger, instead of obtaining their favour. If we are to ask their pardon, we do it with all marks of humility; if we ask them a favour, we do it with submission to their good pleasure; if we go to thank them for favours received, we endeavour so to behave ourselves, as that it may appear we are really sensible of the obligation laid upon us. And this is what God expects from us, as well as our betters. He expects, for instance, that creatures, which cannot subsist one moment without their Creator's blessing, should not think it too much trouble to ask His blessing; that sinners, who are for ever undone without His pardon, should ask His pardon with all humility; that people who live altogether upon His favour, should own their dependence upon Him after a sensible manner; that people who own His power, should be afraid of Him; that such as acknowledge His wisdom, should shew that they do so; and that such as partake of His goodness, should express their sense after the most natural way; that is, at least with as much concern as men come before, speak to, behave themselves in the presence of their betters.

I know very well, what foolish people are ready to say to this. They say, for instance, that though *men* expect all this from people below them, yet God does not; that God sees the heart, and if that be right, that is all which God requires of us.

I will shew you that it is not, and that God expects an outward as well as an inward worship; that God will be offended with our indecent behaviour as well as our betters; and that He will judge us according to that sense we have of our duty towards men above us. "A son (saith God) honoureth his father, and a servant his master: If then I be a father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear? and if ye offer the blind or lame for sacrifice, is it not evil? Offer it unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

Malachi 1. 6, 8.

By this you see, that God is as jealous of His honour as any prince on earth can be; that He is concerned even for the *outward service*, which men pay Him. And though all

[Ps. 50. 11, &c.]

the beasts of the field are His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, as the Psalmist speaks; though the most perfect sacrifice is of no value in the sight of God, but as it is offered in obedience to God's commands, yet God would have a sacrifice as perfect as may be; and He will be offended if His worshippers shall bring Him the lame or the blind.

Agreeable to this, He expects we should pray to Him for what we want, and give Him thanks for the blessings He every day bestows upon us. He sees with what affections we do this, and will be offended with our insincerity; He will also be offended with our irreverence, even as much as a father or a master would in reason be with the disrespect of a son, or the ill behaviour of a servant.

Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, was God's command to Moses, when he was in God's presence, a way of expressing the greatest respect. And this is so natural, that St. Paul does suppose, that if an infidel should come into a congregation of believers, and should there be convinced that God is in truth amongst them, he would immediately fall down and worship God; there being so strict a correspondence betwixt the soul and body, that our hearts are no sooner affected with any thing, but it presently appears in some outward signs of fear, or joy, or reverence. [Exod.3.5.] 1 Cor. 14. 24, 25.

Nay, we may add farther, that an outward reverent behaviour is of use even to create an inward sense of God, and of the duties we owe to Him. Thus the priests, in Joel, are directed *to weep between the porch and the altar.* At another time, they are commanded to put sackcloth upon their loins, and ashes upon their heads. chap. 2. 17.

Now, neither tears, nor sackcloth, nor ashes, are well-pleasing to God, any farther than they are either *expressions* of sorrow, or *means* of creating it, when a sense of our sins requires it, or when it is fit we should be made sensible of our guilt and danger.

In short; both our souls and bodies are God's, and we are to worship Him with both; and those that do not do so, do offer the lame and the blind, which God has declared He abhors.

Since, therefore, it is so very criminal to behave ourselves irreverently in the presence of God, and yet a fault that is

SERM. XXVII.

very common amongst christians; as I have proposed to you the pattern of the inhabitants of heaven, who worship God in the most humble manner, so I do wish that with them you would consider,

II. The *wisdom,* and *greatness,* and *goodness,* and *majesty* of God, in whose house you are, and before whose presence you appear; and then you will be convinced, that He is worthy of all the duty and reverence that His creatures are capable of paying Him; for He created all things, and for His pleasure they were created.

And, in truth, it is for want of consideration, that men appear before God with the same indifference and want of fear, as they would do before an idol, which neither sees, nor can be angry at, the indevotion and ill behaviour of its worshippers.

Now, christians would not do so, if they would but open their eyes, and see the wisdom and power of God in the works of the creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, (saith the Psalmist,) and the firmament sheweth His handy-work. There is neither speech nor language where their voice is not heard." Or, as this is finely paraphrased by an English poet[a]:—

[Ps. 19. 1, &c.]

> All people do their language understand;
> Nor was there ever savage nation known,
> Who in them could not read God's hand;
> In their own tongue all read what's written there,
> For Heaven alone's THE UNIVERSAL CHARACTER.

But lest these things should seem to be above the reach of ordinary capacities, let us consider the things that are about us; all which do manifest some of the attributes of God, and excite us to glorify Him after a becoming manner.

And, in the first place, one would wonder, that of so many sorts of creatures, not one of them, since the creation, is lost. This shews the wonderful *providence* of God, who has taken care of the most contemptible creatures; has provided them with convenient food; has taught them where to seek for shelter against all sorts of storms and enemies, how to defend themselves when they are assaulted, and how to leave a race behind them when they die.

[a] [Samuel Woodford. Paraphrase upon the Psalms of David. 4to. Lond. 1667.]

Our blessed Lord assures us, that not a sparrow dies without God's knowledge and permission; and would have us learn from that instance of God's providence, to put ourselves under His protection, and not to fear what man can do against us. He puts us in mind of another instance of God's care: "Consider (saith He) the fowls of the air: they reap not, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them;" that is, they meet with food convenient for them, as certainly as the day cometh. A sufficient reason why man should depend upon God for his daily bread, and be very thankful for it. [Matt. 6. 26.]

In short; every thing we stand in need of, every thing we enjoy, every thing we see, is capable of exciting in us devout affections, if we would but consider them. For example: have we not great reason to bless God, that for so many ages He has never denied the world His blessings so long as to destroy it for want of necessaries? If we should want rain but for one summer, neither man nor beast could live one year longer. If it should rain one whole winter, all things necessary for our support would perish. If we should have a long calm, the very air would be corrupted, and we should be soon destroyed; and if we should have too long a storm, we should want many things from abroad, which are necessary to our well-being. Does not this convince us of the goodness of God; and should not this make us very thankful when we come before Him?

And then, do but consider the power of God in that one instance which St. Paul mentions, and which every farmer experiences to his comfort: that every grain of corn he sows is, to all appearance, utterly lost; and so would he and his family be too, but that God, by His mighty power, makes the earth to restore it him again, after another manner, and with a sevenfold increase. And so He will restore us to life again, though our bodies are laid in the earth. He has told us He will do it, and this one instance shews us that he can; and that we ought therefore to serve Him most faithfully here, that we may be raised to glory at that great day. [1 Cor. 15.]

And oh! that these considerations might prevail with christians to humble themselves in the presence of God, as becomes sinners, as becomes petitioners, as becomes creatures

SERM. XXVII.

in the presence of their Creator, and subjects in the presence of the great King of all the earth; without whose protection we are exposed to most powerful enemies; without whose providence we cannot subsist one moment; and without whose mercy and pardon we are undone for ever.

Now, because we are but too apt to forget all these considerations, our Church puts us daily in mind how we should behave ourselves before *the face* of Almighty God our heavenly Father; that we should confess our sins with humility and sincerity; that we should hear His holy Word with reverence; that we should render thanks to God for all the benefits which we have received at His hands, and ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul. She puts us in mind that these duties are to be performed with an humble voice as well as a pure heart; she directs us to fall upon our knees when we ask God's mercy and favours, and to stand up when we give Him thanks, or praise His holy name. She orders the Psalms of David to be read, that we may learn to bless God in the words of His Holy Spirit; and we hear the Holy Scriptures, that we may know the will of God, and how He has been served by His faithful servants ever since the world began.

Well then; you will perhaps say, we do all this as we are directed. What, and pray to God without concern; scarce minding what you say, sitting at your ease, or gazing about as if God did not see you, or as if holy angels were not present?

For shame: let us not call this worshipping God; call it *unthoughtfulness, profaneness,* an *evil habit,* or any thing but serving God, for *that* it is not.

To conclude: all thoughtful christians will take a more than ordinary care of their behaviour while they are in God's house and in His presence. We are, you see, in the Scripture way of speaking, *before God.* We would seem to know this, by falling upon our knees as soon as we come into a church. Our business at God's house is, to glorify God in the first place, and then to beg such blessings as we cannot want without being very miserable. And then, if we believe, as we have good reason, that the angels of God are personally present in the house of God, we shall behave ourselves

with a little more decency than we usually do in our own houses; lest they, seeing our ill behaviour, our sloth, and indifference, forsake our Church, return to heaven, and there report, that of a truth the fear of God is not amongst us. This has been the case of an infinite number of Christian churches, which have been destroyed, or are now in the hands of unbelievers, because christians did profane them, or became unworthy of them.

It is a melancholy thing to consider, that too many christians do not think of these things; but fancy that they have done enough when they have been at the house of God, though they have honoured Him neither with their bodies nor souls. But all serious people will consider, that they come to church to pray for pardon of their sins, and that it would be a real misfortune to return home *without absolution;* which, therefore, they receive with the humility of an offender receiving his pardon. They feel the want of grace and strength to do what they are convinced they ought to do; which, therefore, they pray for with the concern of people who will not easily be denied. And lastly; they often remember, with what *fear,* and *reverence,* and *humility,* the holy spirits approach the presence of God; and this they resolve and strive to make their pattern.

And God grant we may all do the same, for Jesus Christ's sake.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE GREAT DUTY OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND GLORIFYING GOD PUT IN PRACTICE.

Assist me, glorious God, by Thy Holy Spirit, so to think and speak of Thee, as that they who hear me may see and acknowledge Thee in Thy wonderful and beneficial works of creation and providence; and that we may all fear, love, and obey, and glorify Thy great name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm xxix. 2.

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name.

See Ps. 19. 1; 145. 5, 10; 150. 6; Jer. 5. 24; Acts 14. 17; Rev. 4. 11.

Every body owns it to be a most necessary duty to praise and glorify the God Who made us, and Who holds our souls in life. But many, too many are at a loss, through a careless, unthoughtful temper, how to do it as they should do. At the same time, there is no one thing which we can cast our eyes upon, but may afford us an occasion of *admiring*, and *glorifying*, either the *power*, or the *wisdom*, or the *goodness*, or the *providence* of God.

Now, the want of thus observing the works of God, is the great occasion of that scandalous indifference in the religion which the generality of christians pay to God. And it cannot be otherwise, *forasmuch as the knowledge of God is the root and the foundation of all true religion:* and the observing His wondrous works, and glorifying Him for them, is the only way of preserving an holy fear, and love, and reverence of God, and an high esteem of Him in our minds.

It is true, God does not need any honour we can pay Him; He is infinitely *great*, and *good*, beyond what we can think or say of Him; but it is altogether for our sakes, that He has

made it our duty to glorify Him; that we may *think*, and *speak*, and *live*, as becomes those who have a due sense and knowledge of God, "in Whom they live, and move, and have their being;" and that they may pay Him an *holy, reasonable*, and *cheerful* service.

And, pray take notice, that in this duty of *glorifying God*, for the works of the creation, we hold communion, in some sense, with the whole world of thoughtful people; which is an instance of communion and charity not to be slighted.

I might entertain you with very many surprising instances of God's wonderful wisdom and goodness in the things He has made; and which, by an amazing providence, He preserves in being; which have been the subject of many learned men, in order to glorify the great Creator: but lest these things should be above the understanding of ordinary capacities, I will set before you, in one short view, the meaning of that *hymn of praise*, in our morning service, which begins with these words, "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and magnify Him for ever." [The Song of the Three Holy Children, ver. 35.]

Now the Church, in this hymn, would have her children instructed to take all occasions offered them to praise, and bless, and magnify their great Creator, for the wonderful provision He has made for the welfare of all His creatures, and especially for the happiness of man both in this life and in the next.

Our duty, therefore, being to glorify God for His works of wonder and mercy; what I now intend is, to shew you the *many occasions you will have of putting this duty in practice;* and especially in the many instances given us in this song of praise, which is, in effect, the same with the 148th Psalm, but here more particularly set forth.

Now, this hymn begins with the most noble part of the creation: "O ye angels of the Lord," &c., which every time we repeat, we should give God thanks for that He gives these His angels charge concerning us poor mortals, as His Holy Spirit assures us He does.

Let us also remember what the same Spirit tells us, that thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of these glorious beings wait upon God continually, to minister unto Him, and to receive His commands. With what

SERM. XXVIII.

thoughts of reverence and fear of this glorious Majesty will this thought affect the mind of every serious christian! And with what comfort will it fill our souls, when we consider, that we shall, *one day*, be as happy as these very angels, if in this state of trial we behave ourselves as God has commanded us!

[Prov. 15. 3; 1 Cor. 11. 10.]

And let us not forget that these angels are in Scripture called *the eyes of God;* and that they are in every place beholding the evil and the good; and especially in the religious assemblies of christians (as St. Paul intimates). And indeed, and as sure as I now speak to you, they are here now present with us in this place, and hear the charge I give you, and are witnesses of your behaviour, and of the attention you give to the service, and to the Word of God read and preached unto you.

In the next place, we are led to bless God for the *heavens* He has made; whether they are those where His Majesty, in an especial manner, together with His glorious angels, resides; or those heavenly bodies, which we see with our eyes, and by which all nations are led to acknowledge the God that made them; and are without excuse if they do not adore and magnify their great Creator.

Gen. 1. 7. Ps. 148.

Moses, in the account of the creation, mentions *the waters that are above the firmament;* and the Psalmist does the same. What these are, or their uses, we know not *perfectly;* and so it is with all God's works; but this we may be assured of, that God made them for His glory, and our benefit; and we ought to praise Him for them, as we do for the rest of the creation.

In the next place, we are called upon to bless and praise God for those wonderful powers by which all nature is governed, and by which all His works are preserved, and do answer the end of their creation. Let us also magnify God for those spiritual powers and agents, by which He orders the affairs of this lower world, protecting and rewarding the good, and bringing the wickedness of the wicked upon their own heads; whether they be particular persons, or whole nations. This is called the providence of God, which we have every day occasions and reason to adore, to fear, and magnify: and let us not forget to do it.

In the next place, how can any man, who has his eyes open, forbear to bless and honour God for those two great lights, the *sun* and *moon*, which He has created? Do but consider the multitude of blessings and comforts which we receive from their light and heat; without which this whole earth, and all the creatures in it, would soon perish. Can any man see, and consider, these glorious bodies, without saying in his heart, how much more glorious must the Maker of them be! How infinitely good and kind must He be, Who for us poor creatures has made such wonderful, such astonishing works! And how insensible, how ungrateful, shall we all be, if we do not bless and magnify our God for these His works!

Let any man look upon the *heavens* in a clear night, and see the innumerable multitude of bright *stars* which adorn the sky, and give us an occasion of glorifying the Maker of such vast bodies of light, which, though by reason of their distance they appear small to us, yet are many times larger than this earth we tread on.

Let us come to things nearer us. *Showers*, and *dews*, are blessings which both man and beast feel the effects and the comfort of; when God, in whose hands are all these blessings, refresheth the earth with the former and the latter rain in their season: and when He denieth us these blessings, it is to punish us for our unthankfulness, and to make us more sensible that all the blessings which we hope for, or enjoy, are to be asked of Him, and that He is to be praised for them.

Little do men consider the uses and blessings of THOSE WINDS, which clear the air we breathe in, and keep it free from infection. For whenever God thinks fit to punish a sinful people, He needs but command the winds to cease, and sickness, plagues, pestilence, and death, will follow of course. This, experience has taught the world; insomuch as, during the last great plague in England, the wind never stirred; and when God gave the word, and the wind arose, the sickness ceased. What reason therefore have men to consider this, and to magnify the wonderful goodness of God for this part of His works, so beneficial to us, and to the rest of the creation!

SERM. XXVIII.

What a comfortless world should we live in (if we could live at all), if our good God had not created *fire* and *heat* for our use, comfort, and necessity; and yet we enjoy them every day, without considering who it is that has provided for us so necessary, so useful, a blessing; and who ought therefore to be praised for it.

The *winter* and *summer* return every year at their proper seasons: would to God our praise and thanksgivings for the same did also return with them! But the commonness of God's blessings and wonders makes us to forget the author of them; and to forget too to praise Him for their several uses. We should not do so, if we did but consider what the sad effects of a *constant summer* must needs be; what a parching *heat* and *drought*, or what a perpetual *pinching cold*, would certainly produce. But God has ordered these grateful changes for His glory, and for our benefit, and that we might have constant occasions of blessing and praising Him for them.

The *dews* and *frosts;* that is, the *hoar frost*, or frozen vapours, the *frost* and *cold*, the *ice* and *snow*, are all necessary in their seasons, to cleanse the air, and to make the earth more fruitful, according to the old observation of the husbandman, that the *snow* manures every poor man's croft, and makes it more fruitful. So that both poor and rich ought to bless God for these instances of His love and care for His poor creatures.

Nights and *days*, *light* and *darkness*, observe and keep the rules and laws which God hath appointed them from the first creation. These glorify their great Creator, by observing the laws He has set them; while men, unthoughtful men, enjoy these blessings without adoring the bounteous goodness of God. They enjoy the rest and quiet of the *night;* too, too many, without giving God thanks for His mercies renewed unto them every morning. They take the advantage of the *light*, and of the *day*, to follow their labours, and too often neglect to bless God for the many *days* He affords them in which to provide necessaries for themselves and their families. The darkness of the night should put us all in mind how uncomfortable our lives would be, if God did not afford us the blessing of the light; by which we can *see*, and *admire*, and *enjoy*, the works of the creation.

This leads us to consider *the earth,* and its wonderful provision for all its numerous inhabitants; and to take occasion, from every blessing we meet with, to observe and to adore the *power,* the *wisdom,* and the *goodness* of God, Who hath made the earth so full of His riches, and Who filleth all things living with plenteousness.

For example: let us take occasion, and bless God for the *fruits of the earth,* by which, through His blessing, our lives are sustained. Let us give God thanks for the grass of the field, by which such a number of creatures are fed for the use of man. Let us take notice of the great variety of those creatures, which are made for our use; some for labour, some for food, some for clothing, some for our pleasure. Who does not see, and feel, the surprising goodness of God, in providing so wonderfully for our ease and welfare? At the same time, let us remember, that our right in these creatures is not absolute; we hold them from God, and He can deprive us of them whenever He sees fit, and whenever we abuse them. And therefore the Spirit of God has given us this rule, *The merciful man is merciful to his beast:* and whoever abuses any of God's creatures, or tortures them, or destroys such as are neither hurtful while they are alive, nor of use when they are killed, will have more to answer for than men usually think of. [Prov. 12. 10.]

We look upon the *mountains* and *hills,* without considering, that without these the earth would be but an uncomfortable habitation; these being made, by a merciful God, to supply the lower parts of the earth with springs and rivers, so *pleasant,* so *comfortable,* so *useful* to man and beast. Let therefore the water we drink and use put us in mind of that most kind God, Who furnishes every country, and especially this of ours, with this necessary element.

The *seas* and *floods* are the next blessings which are called upon to bless and magnify their Maker; that is, we that enjoy these blessings are directed, when we see them, to praise God for the great benefits we receive by them. And indeed, if people who are encompassed by the sea, who cannot, unless they are very stupid indeed, but observe the wonderful laws God hath set it, its surprising ebbings and flowings; who see daily its great advantage to mankind, by

SERM. XXVIII.

the trade it enables men to carry on, and whereby every country has its wants supplied: whoever sees this, great will be their crime, and their judgment severe, if they do not admire, and adore, and praise God for this part of His creation; and especially for the vast provision with which the whole world almost is supplied. Both *great* and *small fish, whales,* and *all that move in the waters,* do all of them give us an occasion of admiring and praising God.

And here let me put you in mind, of what I have often hinted to you, that though the blessings of the seas are innumerable, yet God keeps these blessings under His own especial direction, and gives or withholds them, just as He finds men disposed to receive them with gratitude or unthankfulness. And pray remember the words of Christ's [Luke 5. 5.] disciples; "Master, we have toiled all the night, and taken nothing." And do not many of you, my good friends and neighbours[a], do not you do the same too often? And what can you imagine may be the reason? Either you do not pray for, and give God thanks for His blessings, or you pray for the blessings of the seas, and take your own unlawful ways to procure such gains as God never will bless, never will prosper.

The fowls of the air are the next order of blessings which we are called upon to praise God for creating for our use and benefit. And indeed their number, the variety of their use, and the beauty of some, is so wonderful, that the most ignorant cannot but see the great and good God in their creation. And when we consider what our Saviour has told us, that not the meanest of these creatures but is under the care of God's providence; that a sparrow falleth not without His knowledge; we shall conclude two things especially: *First,* that we, the very meanest of us, are most certainly under His care and protection, and that nothing can befall us without His knowledge and permission. And *secondly,* that the lives of His creatures are not to be wantonly taken away; but only (as we observed before) when they are hurtful to us when *alive,* or useful to us when *killed.*

When the CHILDREN OF MEN have recounted all these works of the Lord, then are they themselves called upon to

[a] [Inhabitants of the Isle of Man.]

bless the Lord, to praise Him, and magnify Him for ever. All the rest of the creation do glorify God in the way which He has appointed them: that is, they give men and angels an occasion of *admiring,* of *loving,* of *adoring,* and of *praising* the Maker of them.

Wherever we turn our eyes (if we do but give ourselves leave to consider), we meet with occasions of praising God, either for His works of mercy, or of judgment. This was one great end of our creation, to *consider,* to *understand,* and to *adore* God. And the more we do this, the more we shall be disposed to love and to serve Him sincerely.

But if all men in general are obliged to praise Him, much more *the Israel of God;* all those to whom He has made Himself, and His will, and laws, known; whom He has chosen for His peculiar people. These will be inexcusable, if they do not adore and praise the Lord Who has been so good and kind to them.

And among these, *the Priests of the Lord* stand bound to glorify Him, by all the obligations of *duty* and *gratitude;* and dreadful will be their punishment if they do not. For it is their business to make others sensible of the ways and works of God, of His mercies and judgments, His favours and corrections, and His designs in all His dealings with the children of men.

In short; all that call themselves *the servants of the Lord,* and are really so, will take all occasions of glorifying their Lord and Master, and endeavour and rejoice to see others do so also. And by doing so, they will join in spirit with all those *holy souls* of the righteous who are in paradise, waiting for a blessed resurrection, and who cease not to bless and praise God for His mercies to them when in this world, and to those whom they have left behind them.

Lastly; all the holy and humble men of heart, all that fear God, that are afraid to offend Him; who in imitation of those holy confessors *Ananias, Azarias,* and *Misael,* will lay down their lives, rather than provoke Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell; all these will glorify God for giving them grace and courage to do their duty to Him, at the hazard of every thing that is dear to them.

We have seen, my christian brethren, our duty, which is,

SERM. XXVIII.

to observe the wonderful works of the creation, and to praise and magnify God; to acknowledge His hand in every thing, and upon all occasions: and this, in order to keep in our minds a constant sense of His glorious perfections, and of our whole dependance upon Him; and an holy fear, and love, and reverence of God in our hearts.

And indeed, it is for want of this, that so many people forget their Maker, and grow *careless, profane, unthankful,* and *wicked;* because God is seldom or never in their thoughts. They will not take notice of the ways and works of God, and what daily reasons they have to love and adore Him. They receive His blessings, and will not acknowledge Him; so that He gives them over to a reprobate mind, a mind insensible and void of judgment.

To prevent this very great judgment, let us, before I conclude, consider, how this duty of acknowledging and praising God, and owning our dependance upon Him, may be put into practice, in one instance or other, every day, every hour of our lives. And be assured of it, christians, you can do nothing more pleasing to God, nor more beneficial to yourselves.

God has given most of us understanding souls. To make us value this mighty blessing, He now and then sends among us a *poor idiot.* Instead of making a jest of such an object of compassion, let us bless God Who has been so good to us, as to give us reason; and let us beg of Him to give us grace never to abuse it.

He has given you an *healthful body.* You see many others labouring under infirmities. Be not unthankful to God for so great a favour. And if the same good God thinks it best for you, and for His glory, to visit you with sickness, you will still have reason to be thankful, if that sickness of the body shall, through His grace, be a means of healing the diseases of your soul.

You have a convenient place to sleep in, and you have the comfort of sleep. Consider how many want one or both these blessings, and you can hardly forget to give God thanks every morning of your life.

You have health and strength to labour, and to get an honest livelihood for yourself and family. Think often of

this, and you will be thankful to God, Who, for good reasons known to Himself, has denied many others this blessing.

Every meal you sit down to should put you in mind of your dependance upon God for life, and food, and power to take it. And they that eat without praising God, and begging His blessing upon His gifts, act too like beasts, and are in danger of perishing with them.

When God gives us seasonable wealth, favourable seed times, the former and the latter rains in their season, and plentiful harvests, how are we bound to thank Him for these general blessings to ourselves and others! And when He denies us these blessings, which He never does but for our good, we are bound, even then, to be thankful.

You are in want of the necessaries of life, and are indebted to others for help and assistance. What is your duty? Why, to bless God for your condition, which is the very best for you (because He has appointed it), and to thank God that He has enabled others to help you, and for that He has given them grace, and an heart to do it.

The same gracious God gives another every thing that his soul can desire: for what end, when others want bread? Why, He makes him His steward, He puts these talents into his hands, and He will fully reward him, if he improves them to his Lord's honour, and the benefit of his master's family.

You have escaped some great danger, or sad misfortune. The very first thing you will do—which you ought at least to do, if you have any sense of religion—is, to give God thanks for your deliverance.

You have been sick, and God has been gracious to you, and hearkened to your prayers, and the prayers of others for your recovery. Will you expect that your prayers will be heard hereafter, if you neglect to praise God for His late mercies?

You have the great comfort of dutiful children. Will not you thank God, every day of your life, for so great a blessing? You will surely do so, when you look into the world, and see how many parents are made miserable by the unhappy and bad lives of their children.

In short; it will be impossible to recount all the occasions a good christian will *have*, and *take*, to praise God for His

SERM. XXVIII.

mercies; for all the known, and for all the unobserved *favours, deliverances, visitations, chastisements,* and *graces,* of His Holy Spirit, vouchsafed unto himself, his friends, and family.

[General Thanksgiving.]

But above all things, let no man, who calls himself a christian, forget or neglect to praise God "for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory." All our happiness in this life, and in the life to come, depends upon this invaluable blessing, and on our being truly sensible of, and thankful for it.

To conclude: the practice of this great duty of praising God for His works, and for His mercies, will preserve in our souls a constant and lively sense of His glorious perfections; which will be a means of making us truly religious, and will make all other religious duties easy and pleasant to us. His almighty power will make us dread offending Him; the sense of our dependance upon Him, and His continual care of us, will incline us to love Him with all our heart and soul; and the grateful remembrance of His past mercies will make us put our whole trust in Him for the time to come.

May God give us all grace to consider these things; that we may with heart and voice join with the heavenly company [Rev. 4.11.] mentioned in the Revelations, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and power, and glory; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy glory they are and were created."

To Him therefore be ascribed all honour and glory, by us and all His faithful servants, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXIX.

THE GREAT DANGER OF DELAYING OUR REPENTANCE.

JOHN IX. 4.

The night cometh when no man can work. See Jer. 13. 16; John 12. 35.

IF this gracious intimation of our Lord were well considered, it would prevent *two very great evils.* It would awaken christians who are too apt to live without thought, and without concern, as if they had no *work,* no *business,* upon their hands; and it would hinder those who know that they *have* something to do, from putting it off till it is too late to finish it.

Our Saviour's words in the text suppose that every man has a *work of importance* upon his hands; and they serve to warn us of the danger of leaving our work undone till it is impossible to finish it. "The night cometh when no man can work;" that is, death is near at hand, as sure as the night follows the day; and therefore, "whatever our hand findeth to do, we ought to do it with all our might;" the consequence of a surprise being most dreadful. [Eccles. 9. 10.]

To prevent this, let us consider, *in the first place,* that we have all a work of importance upon our hands.

Secondly, that we are hastening on towards death, as the day does towards night; and as THAT approaches, we have still less time to finish our work.

And *thirdly,* that our eternal happiness or misery depends upon our doing the work in the day appointed us to do it in.

I. Let us consider seriously, *that every christian has a work of importance upon his hands.*

It is for this reason the Apostle exhorts christians "to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, Phil. 2. 12.

SERM. XXIX.

with a concern suitable to the *work* they have to do; of which *work* take THIS SHORT ACCOUNT.

We are all sinners, and must all make our peace with God, as we hope for mercy. We have renounced the world, and yet we are apt to love it too well, so that we must labour hard to wean our affections from it. We are perpetually in danger of offending God, and we must be upon our watch continually, or we shall certainly do so. We have all, more or less, contracted evil habits, and it will take *time*, and *care*, and *pains*, to get rid of them. We stand in need of the grace of God every moment of our lives, and are every day of our lives obliged to pray for the aids of His Spirit to help our infirmities. We receive favours continually, and are continually bound to thank God for them.

Here is work enough for any christian; and he that fancies he has nothing to do, or thinks christianity to be a state of ease or idleness, does not yet know what it is to be a christian. But even *this* is not all.

We have all of us very many enemies to struggle with:
[1 Pet. 5. 8.] the *devil*, a very powerful spirit, "walketh about continually, seeking whom he may devour," finding them careless and unprepared to resist him. The *world*, a very corrupt world, is always tempting us to follow its ways, which lead to destruction. And lastly, *our own hearts*, if we had no other adversary, would ruin us, without a constant watchfulness. So that a man needs not be at pains to be undone: we shall be undone of course, if we do not labour, and strive, and make resistance.

But then, besides these general duties, which belong to all christians, every christian has his proper work, for the faithful discharge of which he must one day answer.

Parents, for instance, stand charged with the care of their children, to provide for them, and to bring them up in the fear of God.

Masters are accountable for their servants' welfare, and that they live as becomes christians. *Servants* are bound to be obedient and faithful, and it will require care and pains to be so.

Magistrates stand obliged, and must be at pains, to govern and to do justice; and *subjects* must be careful to obey for conscience sake.

The *rich* will find enough to do to watch against pride, covetousness, and many other hurtful lusts, "which drown men in destruction and perdition." [1 Tim. 6. 9.]

And the *poor*, as they have their proper duties, so they have their peculiar difficulties to struggle with,—to be content with their condition, without attempting to better it by unjust ways.

In a word; all christians are accountable for their *time*, for the *talents* they have received, and for the *duties* of that state of life in which the providence of God has placed them. And such as live as if they had nothing to do, will one day wish that they had never been born.

But of all employments, that of a *Pastor* is the most *difficult*, the most *hazardous*, and the most *laborious*, to discharge it faithfully. To conduct christians to eternal happiness, through a corrupt world, infinite errors, and most powerful enemies; to teach the way of salvation, without prostituting the Word of God to vile purposes; to convert sinners to God by their example as well as by their sermons; to instruct the ignorant; to reprove the disorderly; to awaken the consciences of the careless; to silence gainsayers; to comfort and restore dejected penitents; to visit the sick, and to answer all the ends of that great work; to *pray* constantly for a blessing upon our labours, and upon our people, without which all our labour would be in vain. These are but *part* of that great work with which pastors stand charged.

And when we seriously advise christians to remember the work they have to do, and the account they must give, we acknowledge, at the same time, that we ourselves stand charged with a greater burden than *they* do, and that it behoves *us*, above all christians, to remember, "That the night cometh when no man can work," since we have so great a work to answer for. [John 9. 4.]

And now you see, good christians, that we have all of us a *work of importance* upon our hands; a *work* which must, at our peril, be done while the day lasts. To make us all, therefore, more concerned to do the work in its season which God has appointed us, we ought,

II. In the second place, to consider, *That we are all*

SERM. XXIX.

hastening on towards death, as the day does towards the night; and that, as THAT *approaches, we have still less time to finish the work we have to do.*

The truth is, the sentence of death is already passed upon every one of us. And God only knows when that sentence is to be put in execution; till then, *He* has allowed us time to prepare for an *everlasting state* that must follow; a state of *endless misery*, if we shall have spent our time ill; and a state of *unspeakable happiness*, if we shall have done the work in its season which God hath appointed us.

We shall do well therefore to consider, that the time of our life, which is already past, and was not employed in doing our duty, is for ever lost to us; which must needs be an astonishing thought to all such as have spent the greatest part of their life in sin and vanity, without considering why God sent them into the world, or what will be expected from them when they come to account for the time they have lived. He that has spent his youth in folly and doing nothing, has no more youth to spend in virtue; and he that has never thought of the concerns of his soul, till a few days before he comes to die, has but a few days in which to provide for eternity. Now, *this* is a consideration which should make christians very serious indeed.

If a man in his worldly affairs has made an ill bargain, *time*, and *advice*, and *future care*, may set all straight again, and the loss may be made up. If a man has spent a good estate, he has this comfort however, that he shall not always live to be reproached for his bad husbandry. But what amends can be made, what arguments can be made use of, to comfort a person who has lived an unthoughtful, useless, sinful life, and is just going to give an account of his talents, and the use he has made of them?

Christians would do well to lay these things to heart, and not to trust the endless welfare of their souls to such uncertainties as are the number of our days, which God only knows, and Who may be provoked to shorten them when men make so ill use of them.

In short; we are no sooner out of the hands of our Maker, but we are upon our way to the grave; we do, as St. Paul speaks, "We die daily." Some part of our *time*, some of our

[1 Cor. 15. 31.]

friends, some of our *comforts,* are every day going, till at last we follow them ourselves. I must not say, *and then there's an end of us;* so far from that, that *then* begins our *happiness* or *misery;* for,

III. *Our eternal happiness or misery will depend upon our having spent this life well or ill;* this being the sentence of life and death: "They that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire." [John 5. 29; Matt. 25. 41.]

A *consideration* so serious and affecting, to such as lay any thing to heart, that one should need say no more on this head, if the corrupt heart of man, as we find by sad experience, did not render this very consideration of little use, by inventing ways to delude themselves, without scripture, and without reason.

I shall not now insist upon the delusion of those who take no care how they spend their time, depending upon the prayers of those they leave behind them, as if God had given them any warrant in His Word to do so; or as if those they leave behind them would be more concerned for their souls than they themselves were, when they were alive. Neither shall I do any more than take notice of the delusion of such as depend upon the *goodness* of God, without considering, that God is *just* as well as *good;* and having expressly declared, that "He will judge men according to the works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil;" He will most certainly do so, though foolish men should fancy that He will not be severe with them, notwithstanding their provocations. He has shewed the world that He can be severe, when sinners go on to provoke Him, by destroying not only particular persons, but families, cities, countries, and the whole world, for their wickedness.

But that which I would more particularly insist upon is, *the delusion of depending upon a* DEATH-BED REPENTANCE; when men defer that, which should be the work of their whole life, to the very last moments of it, *to the evening, when no man can work.* A delusion so common, that one cannot be too earnest with christians to beware of it, lest it happen to them as it did unto Esau, "who found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Heb. 12. 17.

SERM. XXIX.

Christians, therefore, should be very often put in mind, that the terms of salvation are already fixed, which are, "That without holiness no man shall see the Lord." That when men "repent, they should turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance." A very dreadful consideration to such as have put off their amendment till it is too late to be done! To which if we add such considerations as *these:* That the condition of such as defer their repentance grows every day more and more desperate. That the judgment of the unfruitful tree, "cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" may be passed upon a sinner, when he least thinks of it. That the merciful invitation, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," supposes, that there is a time when He will not be found of them that seek Him; that "he who being often reproved, yet hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." That the state of sinners may be so provoking, that though *Noah*, *Daniel*, and *Job*, should intercede for them, yet God will not hearken to their prayers.

[Heb. 12. 14.] [Acts 26. 20.] [Luke13.7.] Isaiah 55. 6. [Prov. 29. 1.] [Ezek. 14. 13, &c.]

Whoever considers these things, and that God has made our time short, and our death uncertain, on purpose that we may begin betimes to consider of our latter end, and be always prepared for our Lord's coming; that death is ever at hand, and the consequence of a surprise most dreadful;—a christian cannot think of these things with any degree of seriousness, but he must see a necessity either of being prepared for death whenever God shall call him, or of being undone for ever—which cannot be thought on without astonishment.

Well then; what a wise man when he comes to die would wish that he had done, *that* he ought to do *forthwith*, "since in the midst of life we are in death;" since the day wears away apace, and since eternity depends upon our making use of our time.

[Burial Service.]

I will therefore tell you, what every man in his senses will wish he had done when the night comes; that is, when he comes to die; he will wish, for instance—*First*, that he had made a just and christian settlement of his temporal concerns, that he might not be distracted with the cares of this world, when all his thoughts and hopes should be upon

another. *2ndly;* That he had made his peace with God by a timely repentance. *3rdly;* That he had faithfully done his duty in the state of life in which the providence of God had placed him. *4thly;* That he had, in some good measure, weaned his affections from things temporal, and had loosened the ties which fasten us to the world. *5thly;* He will wish, moreover, that by acts of mercy and charity he had entitled himself to the mercy of God, which, at the hour of death, and at the day of judgment, he will stand in need of. *6thly;* That he had got such habits of patience and resignation during his health, that might render death less frightful. *7thly,* and lastly; He will wish, that by a constant practice of devotion, preparatory for death, he had learned what to pray for, what to hope for, and what to depend upon, in his last sickness.

This is what every man will wish that he had done, when he comes to die; that *when the night cometh,* he may have *no more work to do,* than to resign his soul into the hands of God, in hopes of a blessed resurrection.

I will just shew you the *reasonableness,* and the *necessity,* of having all *these works* done before the night comes, when no man *can* do them as he *ought* to do.

And first, for what concerns the *settlement of a man's temporal affairs.* If we consider the duties of one who is going to make his *last will;* that he is to take care for the *payment of all his just debts;* that he is to make *restitution,* if he has wronged any body; that his charities ought to be useful, and as large in proportion as the favours he has received; that he is to do no *wrong,* shew no *resentment,* leave *nothing undone,* which may as much as possible prevent *misunderstandings, quarrels,* and *lawsuits,* amongst executors. Whoever, I say, would faithfully discharge all these engagements, must not fancy that these things are to be done in a hurry, when the *night is come,* and a man wants time to consider, friends to advise, and power to recollect, his distracted thoughts.

And if so much time is necessary to settle a man's *temporal* concerns; much more is necessary to settle his *spiritual, to make his peace with God by a sincere repentance;* which every man when he comes to die will wish with all his

SERM. XXIX.

soul he had done while he was in his health, and could redeem his misspent time, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance,—*which is the only sure sign of a true conversion.*

In short; a christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance. He ought to see and bewail the *corruption of his nature*, which makes him backward to please God, ready to offend Him, fond of the pleasures of this life, and unthoughtful of that which is to come. He ought to call himself to an account daily, and see whether he gets the mastery of his corruptions, and whether he does not often fall into the sins he has repented of. He ought to have some good assurance that he grows in grace, and that he is in some good measure restored to the image of God, in which he was at first created. This, I say again, ought to be the work of a man's whole life; and he that leaves it to the last moments of his life, must not expect the comforts of an happy death.

All christians are most highly concerned to lay these things to heart. They should imitate the wise builder, who sat down and counted the cost, whether he was able, and whether he was resolved, to go through the work. So should every man seriously consider what it is he undertakes, when he promises to be a christian; namely, that he will no longer be the devil's subject and servant; that he will no longer follow his own corrupt inclinations, but be governed by the law of God, and do that which he believes will best please God. That he will receive the Gospel as the law of God, without doubting its truth, or disputing the reasonableness of its injunctions. That he will obey the laws of God, as the only way of pleasing God, and of qualifying himself for heaven and happiness. Besides this, he is to consider the difficulties he is certain to struggle with; namely, a corrupt world, a corrupt heart, infinite errors, and powerful enemies, which yet he is not to submit to; forasmuch as the Almighty God has promised to defend and assist him.

[Luke 14. 28.]

In short; if christians could be prevailed on to consider betimes, that this life is but a short passage to another, which is to last for ever; that it is a state of trial; that our eternal happiness or misery depends upon our good or bad behaviour

while we live here; that God requires obedience to His laws, *only* that we may not be miserable; that He requires nothing of us but what He will enable us to go through, even with pleasure, if we submit ourselves entirely to be governed by His Spirit, and by His laws. If christians would consider this, and that *the night of death cometh, when no man can work;* it is probable they would think of what they have to do with a little more seriousness than is to be met with; and *consider things as they have regard to eternity,* without which we shall, *before we perceive it,* set our hearts upon the world, forget the only business for which we were sent into it, and, when we come to die, have no sign of virtue to shew; and, when it is too late, repent that we have been *unprofitable servants.* [Wisdom 5. 13.]

To conclude: The sentence passed upon Adam, and in him upon all his posterity, after his fall, was *this:* "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Labour, therefore, is a duty, from which no man is exempt, without forfeiting his right to his daily bread; we are obliged to it *by this sentence,* as we are the children of Adam. As we are christians, we are obliged to it, in conformity to Jesus Christ, whose whole life was all labour and sufferings. And lastly, as sinners, we are bound to it, because, without labour and pains, we can never be reconciled to God. [Gen. 3. 19.]

It behoves us all, therefore, to take care that this great business of our life be not put off till it is too late to finish it; lest death overtake us unawares, and we be obliged to bewail our unthoughtfulness in a miserable eternity.

SERMON XXX.

THE CONDITION OF OBTAINING THAT PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING.

PSALM xxix. 10.

See Luke 1. 79.

The Lord shall give His people the blessing of peace.

IF you expect that, *from these words,* I shall speak of the blessings of a *peace* which we have talked of so much of late, and wished for; though *that* is the *occasion,* it is not to be the *subject* of the discourse I am now going to make to you.

The truth is, considering that the world was engaging all our thoughts and passions in favour of an expected peace, and the consequences of it, I thought it would be a very proper time to put people in mind of a *peace of another kind,* which the world can neither give nor take away; and which it concerns us, above all things, to think of.

It is true, even a *worldly peace* is a very *desirable blessing;* but then, it is so little in *our* power to hinder or promote it, that *we* are not accountable whether it goes forward or not. Besides, such a peace (though made with wisdom and foresight) is at best uncertain; neither does our happiness depend upon it.

But the *peace* which I would propose to your meditations is of another nature: it is what is *certainly attainable;* our happiness depends upon it; it is *our* business to look after it; and *we* shall be accountable, *we* shall be the sufferers, if we do not obtain it. It is that peace which we pray for daily, *which the world cannot give,* which the world cannot deprive us of, and which, if we once obtain it, will effectually

convince us, that the government of the world, and consequently all the changes of this mortal life, are in the hands of God, Who will always do what is best for such as fear Him.

In short; this is that legacy which the *Son of God* left at His death to all His faithful servants, *in these words,* "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Of *which peace* the words of the text are a prophecy; "The Lord shall give His people" [*the true Israelites*] "the blessing of peace." [John 14. 27.]

It is certain, it is *God Who maketh wars to cease in all the world.* This He does to all, as *He maketh His sun to shine on the evil, and on the good;* but it is to *His people* only that He gives that peace, which is a blessing indeed, and which *passeth all understanding.* As for all others, *the way of peace they know not.* [Ps. 46. 9.] [Matt. 5. 45.]

And now, if what has been said has raised in you a desire of knowing more particularly, *what this peace is; how we may obtain, how we may secure, so great a blessing;* and *what will be the fruits and effects of it;* I shall, by the good blessing of God, endeavour to give you satisfaction in each of these particulars.

I. And first; *what is the peace here spoken of?* I know not whether one can give a better answer to this question, than in the words of our Church, in one of her hymns, in the *office of Ordination,* where she describes and prays for *this blessing* in *these words:* "Put back our enemies far from us, and help us to obtain peace in our hearts with God and man,"—the best, the truest gain. [Veni Creator Spiritus.]

To be a little more particular. It is *that peace* which arises in our souls, by *believing* and sincerely *embracing these truths:* That Jesus Christ, *our peace-maker,* hath reconciled us to God *by the blood of His cross;* that if, even after this reconciliation, any man sin (as we are apt to do), our condition is not desperate; for we have *an Advocate with the Father,* Whose sake God will graciously receive and pardon all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him; and because of ourselves we are not able to please God, that He has promised His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, by whom the *eyes of our understanding shall be enlightened, our* Col. 1. 20. [1 John 2. 1.] [Eph. 1. 18.]

SERM. XXX.

infirmities helped, our souls strengthened, until we are *rooted* and *grounded* in the *love of God.*

This is the foundation of *that peace* we are speaking of, which consists in an humble assurance, (built upon God's promise,) that He is no longer our enemy; that we are under His guidance and protection; that we are safe while we continue so; and that we shall always continue so, if it is not our own fault.

We easily perceive, that this is a blessed state of life; and we shall see it yet plainer, when we have considered the condition of those, who, instead of enjoying this *happy peace,* are at *war* with God and their own consciences; as all indeed *are* who live in any known sin.

To defy the Almighty; to despise what He can do to us; are words of too much horror and madness to be spoke out: but let it be considered, whether men do not what they dare not speak, while they live in *rebellion,* in an open defiance of
1 Pet. 2. 11. His laws? The Holy Scriptures call *this* "a state of war;"
Rom. 7. 14. in which we are not only *led captive,* but like slaves "sold under sin;" which expressions are made use of, to represent unto our minds the miseries of such a condition, where (if our consciences are awake) we are in continual fear of being undone.

And verily, it were better for us, that our houses were burnt over our heads, our goods plundered, and ourselves prisoners, and at the will of our enemies, than that we should be at war with God, and our own consciences. So saith our
Luke 12. 4. Saviour expressly, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear Him which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

But if this be so unhappy a condition, how comes it to pass, that so many are so easy under it? One would rather expect, that one half of the world should be distracted with the fears of what shall become of them. Why truly so they would, if they did but see the danger they are in: but there are ways of preventing this.

Some there are, whose consciences are *hardened,* or (as the
1 Tim. 4. 2. Apostle expresses it,) "seared with a hot iron." It cannot

be expected that *these* should feel any uneasiness. There are *others*, who make their minds easy, by purposing some time or other to lead a new life, and so to die in the favour of God. *Many* fear no danger, because they perform the outward acts of christian worship as well as others. Lastly, the greatest part of men seek for ease, and in some measure find it, in the great variety of business, in the great variety of pleasures, in worldly cares, and worldly company: and the very reason why people choose *any* of these methods of ease, before a more perfect acquaintance with themselves, is *the sad apprehension of knowing God to be their enemy*, and an *unwillingness to do what is necessary to gain His friendship.*

It is not our business, at present, to shew the extreme folly of laying conscience asleep, by these or any other ways; but *this* is fit to be taken notice of, that there is a vast difference betwixt *peace of conscience*, and *fearing no danger.*

A man may be asleep on the top of a mast, (as Solomon observes,) and fear no danger; but it cannot be said, that he is in safety. One may *stifle, divert, bribe,* and *sear* the conscience; one may wink hard, and stop his ears, so that he shall neither *hear*, nor *see* the mischief that is ready to befall him; and yet the danger is as near him as if he saw it. But *peace of conscience*, arising from the knowledge of *God's goodness*, and our *sincere endeavours* of doing what we know will please Him, is both *safe* and *grateful;* and while we enjoy the blessing of *this* calm, we need not fear a storm will follow. Prov. 23. 34.

II. *How we may obtain this blessed peace*, we come now to consider. But first let us consider, that the conditions of *this* peace cannot possibly be *hard* or *unreasonable.*

As God has a *right* to give us laws, so all His laws do proceed from His *goodness* and *kindness* for His creatures: "For never (saith the Wise Man) "would God have made any thing, if He had hated it." Here then let us fix our firm belief, *That the love of God for us was the foundation of all that He has commanded us to believe or do, in order to our happiness.* Wisd. 11. 24.

He only knows, what can make us happy; what we can do ourselves; what help we shall want; what enemies we shall meet with; what dispositions are necessary to fit us for that happiness He has designed for us: and all His commands

SERM. XXX.

(*which are the conditions of our peace*) are all given for these very ends; and not to be a burden to us.

After all, we must not imagine, that this great blessing is to be obtained without trouble. To get out of the snare of the devil; to break off evil habits; to accustom one's-self to virtuous actions; to make the service of God one's delight; this will require *pains*, and *patience*, and *prayers*, and searchings of heart, before it is brought about: and sure it is worth all this, to be possessed of *that peace*, which ariseth from an assurance of *being beloved of God*.

To come to the conditions of this peace we are speaking of;—*how it is to be obtained.*

Now, all our *fears* arising from a sense of our having offended God, our peace can no otherwise be made, than by *obtaining His pardon, receiving the terms of grace* which He proposes, and resolving to be more fearful of offending Him for the time to come; or, in other words, the conditions of our peace are, *repentance, faith,* and *obedience.* By *repentance,* we are reconciled to God; by *faith,* we understand what will please God, and are encouraged to undertake it; by *obedience,* we gain such dispositions as fit us for heaven.

He that would find *rest unto his soul* has *this,* and *this* way only, of obtaining it: he may lay his conscience *asleep;* he may please himself with ways of his own devising; he may flatter himself that God will be merciful to him, though he should not observe these methods of peace; but *safe* it is impossible for any man to be, except in the way of God's appointment.

Let us now see what the Scriptures say upon these conditions of peace.

2 Tim. 2. 19. And first, *of repentance.* St. Paul assures us, that *this* is the *foundation* of our peace with God; and upon which He will *acknowledge us:* "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ" (and pretends to be His servant) "depart from iniquity." How depart from iniquity? Why, not only confess our sins, (which we are ready enough to do, and lament our weaknesses;) but sincerely resolve, for the time to come, to forsake every evil way, to avoid all sin, and the occasions of it.

[James 3. 2.] But we are beset with temptations, and *in many things we*

offend all. Must not we, therefore, hope for pardon and peace, when at any time we have been overtaken in a fault? Yes, sure; but on this condition only, that when I repent of any fault, I do at the same time sincerely resolve, not to repeat *that fault* in particular, and to the best of my power to do as I have resolved, praying for grace as well as pardon: otherwise, he that does not keep a stricter watch over such sins as do most easily beset him, must not too confidently hope for pardon: which obliges me to take notice of a mistake which people are too apt to run into.

We are apt to conclude, that if in the main our lives be tolerable; for a slip now and then, there is no great hurt in it.

But pray let us consider, that such slips as these, *if wilful*, are a plain disowning of God's authority, and as plain a forfeiture of His favour, and the peace which attends it.

All at present that I shall say to this mistake is this: see what are those sins which the Scriptures say *will keep men out of heaven.* If *your* sin, which you now and then indulge, is one of those, (as to be sure it is,) why then depend upon it, it will shut you out of heaven; and then it is all one how many other good qualifications you had; they will be of no use to you.

In short; He that calleth sinners to repentance, calleth them from *all their sins.* And it is the greatest instance of presumption, to hope that God will pass by any wilful sins, because we *serve* Him in other things; as if our service profited *Him* more than *ourselves.*

But to proceed: to the promise of God, "that He will accept of our repentance, instead of a sinless obedience," there is this condition added, "If ye forgive men their tres- Matt. vi. 15.
passes, your heavenly Father will forgive you your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."

Now, this is so far from being a burdensome condition, that it is certainly one of the most comfortable clauses that could have been added to the article of repentance. For, if I sincerely forgive others, I may plead with God for a pardon for my own sins which I have repented of, and very securely depend upon His word and promise. Thus you see how

SERM. XXX.

necessary, and how *reasonable* it is, that we should *repent*, as we hope for the favour of God.

The next condition of our peace is *faith*, by which we receive the conditions of our salvation offered us by Jesus Christ; *believing* Him to be sent from God for that very end; confidently relying upon all that He hath revealed to us, without questioning His authority, or disputing His commands.

Now, whoever has this faith will soon find himself obliged to do what God has commanded, in order to his peace and happiness. For instance: if he really *believes* that God has in His Holy Word set down the terms of salvation, he will not hope for salvation on any other terms. If he *believes* that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, he will think himself certainly obliged to *purify himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*. If he *believes* that God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, as he will find reason, so he will not fail to *pray* for, the comfort and assistance of that blessed guide. If he *believes* a judgment to come, he will take care to examine and to judge himself, that he may not be condemned of the Lord when He cometh to judge the world in righteousness. Lastly, if he *believes* the everlasting *rewards* and *punishments* of the life to come, he *cannot* be indifferent which of these may be *his own portion*.

[Heb. 12. 14.]

[2 Cor. 7. 1.]

From all which it appears, that *faith*, as it is *a condition of our peace*, is a real *principle of obedience*; not only discovering to us where we are to look for happiness, but also engaging us to *do* what we believe we ought to do in order to attain it.

And this brings us to consider the last condition of our peace with God, a *sincere obedience*. "He that doeth the will of My Father," saith Jesus Christ (and *he only*), "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." And what the will of God is, the Apostle tells us: "This is the will of God," the great design of the Gospel, "even your sanctification;" that is, that we be renewed in our nature, freed from the tyranny of sin, and so far in the way of perfection, as to be always making some progress towards it.

Matt. 7. 21.

1 Thess. 4. 3.

And why is *this* so necessary an *article of our peace?* Why, because this is the *wedding garment*, without which

[Matt. 22. 11, 12.]

no man shall ever be admitted into heaven. For, *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* [Heb. 12. 14.]

SEE THE GOODNESS OF GOD:—He does indeed positively require our obedience to certain laws He hath given us; but then this is to the end "that, by obeying the truth, we may purify our souls," and qualify ourselves for heaven, where no impure thing can enter. 1 Pet. 1. 22.

But how shall we know the laws He has given us for this purpose? Would to God *that* were the only thing that is wanting to make our obedience perfect! He that endeavours to live up to that measure of knowledge he has already, and is ready to do the will of God at all times when he knows it, "he shall (as our Saviour saith) know of the doctrine whether it be of God." [John 7. 17.]

Thus I have laid before you the *nature* and the *conditions* of a peace better than any the world can give; the effect of a conquest greater than those the world so much magnifies. It is Solomon's assertion, not mine, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." Prov. 16. 32.

What hinders us then from obtaining this peace? Do we think it will be time enough hereafter? *When*, pray? When we come to die? Perhaps that may be too late. To be plain, God has fixed the time: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." And he who will not take *this time*, may, too likely, never embrace another. [Heb. 3. 7, 8.]

But perhaps I am persuading you to seek for *that peace* which most men think they are possessed of. We may easily know that, by considering seriously whether we observe the conditions before-mentioned.

A sign of true *repentance* (for instance) is amendment of life: a sign of true *faith* is, our living as if the things we profess to believe were true: a sign of true *obedience* is, having respect unto all God's commandments.

Verily, if we have not this testimony of our peace with God, we have no manner of reason to be easy with our condition: it is a false peace we are possessed of, which will stand us in no stead at the hour of death (when we shall have most need of it), nor in the day of judgment. He that shall not have made his peace with God before he go hence, (and how soon that may be, God only knows,)

SERM. XXX.

he will have God for his enemy, and for his portion eternal misery.

But God forbid that we should let so great a concern continue in so great uncertainty. Is the peace of God of so little value? Is the peace of conscience, grounded upon God's Word, not worth our striving for? Is the love of God, which is better than life itself, a favour fit to be despised? And yet, do we not plainly despise Him and His offers of mercy, when we despise the means laid down for our salvation?

The Gospel is, with great reason, styled *the Gospel of Peace;* because the terms of *peace* and *salvation* are contained in it. And yet, it seems, these terms may be hid or cannot be perceived by some. But who are they? Why, only such as are lost,—lost to all concern for themselves, all gratitude to God, and all sense of virtue. As to all others, who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, *they* see the *reasonableness,* the *exceeding mercy,* of the terms of reconciliation proposed in the Gospel: they find by experience, that "the work of righteousness (as the Prophet speaks) is peace; and that the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."

[2 Cor. 4. 3.]

Is. 32. 17.

Having therefore made their peace with God by a *sincere repentance;* having received the Gospel with a full resolution to be governed by its laws; and lastly, being intent to subdue their wills and affections to the will of God; having these testimonies of their *repentance, faith,* and *obedience,* they find themselves upon *good grounds* easy; being hereby *freed* from the tyranny of their corruptions, from the prevailing power of the devil, from the terrors of an evil conscience, from the wrath of an angry God, and from the fears of what may come hereafter.

These motives, *to well-disposed minds,* will be sufficient to oblige them to set about the work of their conversion, with fear, and a concern worthy of so great an interest. I shall therefore conclude this discourse, after I have made a few *useful observations* from what has been said.

And first; as this *blessing of peace is the gift of God,* so the conditions on which we may hope to attain it are set down in His Word. And if an angel from heaven should tell me that I might obtain *pardon* and *peace* upon any other terms

than *repentance* and *holiness of life*, I should have reason to suspect his message. How miserably disappointed then are they like to be, who *continue in sin*, depending upon *God's mercy*, — upon the prayers of the faithful, — or upon any other method which God has no where declared He will accept of!

Secondly; if obedience to the laws of God be necessary to obtain such dispositions as shall fit us for heaven; what will be the lot of those who put off *their conversion* to the last moments of their lives? If becoming *a new creature* (which is absolutely required in the Christian dispensation), if that be necessary, sure it will require time to be formed, as all other creatures do.

Our third observation may be *this:* that such as make their whole lives a course of *sinning* and *repenting*, depending upon God's goodness, should consider, that this is a very odd way of reasoning,—that because God is merciful, I may therefore be *less* careful to *please* Him.

Fourthly; that such as dare not look into the *state of their souls*, may depend upon it, they are *not* in the *way of peace*, however easy they may be: because *peace of conscience* ariseth from a *knowledge* and *assurance*, that God will be *favourable* to me *according to His Word;* because, upon considering my ways, I find that they are ordered in some good measure according to that Word.

Lastly; this blessing is attainable by all sorts and conditions of men, who shall set their hearts upon it. For as we may have all worldly blessings, and yet want *this*, which is *better* than *all* besides; so we may want those worldly blessings, and be possessed of this, which will make us sufficient amends. Our *weakness* cannot hinder us, when *God* has promised to hear and help us. Want of *spare time* to seek after it should not discourage us, since God, *the author of peace*, has appointed us our *lot in the world*. And *want of learning* will be no excuse; for God has given us a *conscience* to supply that want in a good measure; and he that attends to *that* will in most instances *know* what will please God.

What have we then all to do, but with an *humble faith* to embrace those truths, *which lie open* to the *meanest capacities;* with a willing obedience to do what we believe will please

SERM. XXX.

God; and with an unfeigned sorrow to beg God's pardon whenever we know we have offended Him, and strive in earnest to do so no more.

Then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be with us, and remain with us for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXI.

WORKS, NOT WORDS ONLY, NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

MATTHEW vii. 21.

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.

See Matt. 7. 23; 10. 33; 23. 28, 29; Luke 6. 46, 48; 8. 21; 1 Cor. 4. 20; 2 Tim. 2. 19; James 1. 22; 1 John 1. 6.

How often do we hear these words of Christ! That you may attend to what is going to be said to you upon this subject, pray take notice, that the salvation of every soul of us will depend upon our understanding this declaration of our Lord, and upon our ordering our lives accordingly. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord," that is, who professeth himself a christian, and observes the outward duties of Christianity, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father:" he that leadeth a Christian life, he, and he only, shall be saved.

There is a most sad mistake, which people of all religions and professions do naturally fall into; namely, to satisfy themselves with performing the outward parts of religious worship, without considering, that the strictest observation of such duties will avail us nothing in the sight of God, if we are not by these, and through His grace, brought to lead a *godly, righteous,* and *sober life,* to His honour and glory. [Tit. 2. 12.] This was the false hopes of the Jews, and this was their ruin at last, when they would not be persuaded, either by their prophets, or by Christ, or by His forerunner the Baptist, to mend their lives; but depended upon their acceptance with God, on account of their strict observance of their outward worship and ceremonies, without a change of heart and manners.

At the same time, we must not imagine but that the public worship and ordinances of religion are an acceptable

SERM. XXXI.

way of honouring our Creator and Redeemer; of obtaining the graces and blessings of God; and a powerful *means* of forwarding our salvation. But still they are only *means*, and intended by God to lead and enable us to perform the duties, *the necessary duties*, which we owe to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; namely, to live *soberly, righteously*, and *godly*, in this present evil world.

Outward ordinances are a powerful means of bringing us to salvation, through the grace of God. For indeed, if we did not observe one day in seven, we should soon forget the God that made us, and the Saviour who redeemed us; if we did not go to church to hear God's Word, we should be ignorant of His will; if we did not often pray to God for His blessing upon ourselves and our labours, we should forget that we depend upon Him for *life*, and *breath*, and *all things;* that is, in other words, *we should live without God in the world;* we should be downright atheists. [Acts 17. 25.]

But when we join with our fellow christians in glorifying God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings we enjoy, or hope for; this will be a powerful means of imprinting on our hearts a grateful reverence for God when we leave His house.

So when we hear His promises of eternal happiness to those that obey Him, and the dreadful judgments that must be the portion of those that neither love, nor fear, nor worship God, as they ought to do; these truths often repeated are very proper to comfort and encourage such as are serious and good, and to awaken, and to amend the wicked.

And so for the other outward ordinances of Christianity; they are truly *means of salvation*, when they are observed as they ought to be.

What an invaluable blessing is it, to be received into the Church of God *by baptism;* to be made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; to be under the government of God's Holy Spirit, and under the care of His angels.

These are powerful motives to such as have any thoughts and concern for their souls, to live as becomes the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

The sacrament of the *Lord's Supper* is another outward

and *powerful means* of salvation. We are too apt to forget what was promised for us when we were made christians, and too apt, God knows, to fall into the sins we have repented of. Now in this sacrament Jesus Christ has provided a remedy for both these evils. We are here put in mind, and required, to examine into our lives, whether we live as becomes the Gospel of Christ; and if we have not done so, to repent and amend, as we hope for salvation, with assurance of pardon, through the merits and mediation of Christ, if we do so.

These are *means* of making us religious, and acceptable to God; but then we must have a care of flattering ourselves, that because we observe these outward ordinances, that therefore we are truly religious and in a happy condition; for a man may have *a form of godliness without the power*. One may be a strict observer of the Lord's day, a careful attender upon the public worship, without an heart sincerely disposed to lead a Christian life, to be governed by the Word we have heard, and the precepts given us in the Gospel. "They hear My words," saith God, by His Prophet, "but will not do them." [2Tim.3. 5.] Ezek.33.31.

You shall hear what God saith by another Prophet: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and come before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, we hope for pardon? Is not this to make the house of God a den of thieves, of drunkards, and all uncleanness?" Jer.7.9—11.

You shall hear what an Apostle of Christ tells us: that in the last days, even an outward profession of Christianity shall be attended with the greatest crimes. Men, even men professing Christianity, shall be "lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, despisers of those that are good, incontinent, fierce, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." 2 Tim. 3. 2—4.

Need we any greater proof that we are *even now* in the last days of Christianity, when we see christians, so called, guilty of such crimes as these, under an outward form of religion? Not considering, "that they crucify to themselves the Son of God again, and put Him to an open shame." Heb. 6. 6.

SERM. XXXI.

Now, in order to prevent these sad delusions, let every serious christian, who hopes for salvation, ask himself, Why do I call Jesus Christ my Lord; or, in other words, why do I profess myself to be a christian? Is it not because, as we are sinners, we are under the displeasure of God, and therefore can have no hopes of salvation, if by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through faith in His blood, we are not restored to God's favour, and obtain His pardon, and by His Holy Spirit be enabled to lead an holy and a Christian life? If we do not therefore endeavour to lead such a life, we must never hope for the kingdom of heaven, notwithstanding all our outward devotion and professions.

You observe the Lord's day, and attend the service of the Church: this is certainly a Christian duty, and well done; but then, if you are not a better christian for it all the week after, it is to be feared you went to church out of shame, or out of custom only, and not out of devotion to God, or to obtain such heavenly dispositions as are necessary to your leading a good life.

We come to church *to glorify God*, by owning our whole dependance on Him, and to give Him thanks for His providence and care of us; but then we must not forget, that God will be more glorified by our good lives when we return home, than by our good words here. You have our Lord's word for this: "In this is My Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit." [John 15. 8.]

We come hither *to confess and beg pardon for our sins.* Now if we come with an unforgiving temper, or without a full purpose, through the grace of God, of leading a new life, not one sin will be forgiven us, but we shall return home under the displeasure of an offended God, and fall into all the disorders of a sinful life.

We come here *to make an open confession of our faith;* and it is our duty to do so. We profess our belief in God, the Father and Creator of all things. Now if as such we fear, love, honour, and obey Him, our faith is right. Only let us not forget, that there are people, "who profess to know God, but in works deny Him;" and that such are reprobates. Tit. 1. 16.

We profess our belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and

our Lord and Saviour; but then we must know, and remember, that He is the author of eternal salvation to them, *and to them only,* that obey Him.

We profess our belief in the Holy Ghost, as the author of all our graces, who helps our infirmities, enlightens our minds with saving truths, and is the sole principle of a Christian life, and for that end given us at our baptism. But then we must know, that if we grieve Him by our evil lives, He will leave us to ourselves, and then what will our faith profit us?

You come to church *to hear God's holy Word read and explained,* to be put in mind of your duty; to awaken you, if you have forgot it, into a sense of your danger, and of the happiness you may lose. Now, all this is lost upon you, with the loss of your souls, if you do not return home with a full purpose of leading a life answerable to what you have heard. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Rom. 2. 13.

Lastly; you return home with *a solemn blessing* upon you from God by His own minister, appointed to bless the people in His name. Now that it may be an effectual blessing to you, let it be your sincere desire and endeavour, that you may grow in grace, that you may live to God's glory by leading an holy life; and you may depend upon it, God the Father will be your preserver, God the Son will be your redeemer, God the Holy Ghost your sanctifier, unto your lives' end.

In short; if the service of the Church doth not create in us holy affections, sincere purposes of amending our ways where we have done amiss, and of honouring God, not only with our *lips,* but in our *lives;* all our outward devotions and prayers will stand us in no stead, neither *now,* nor at the hour of death, nor in the day of judgment.

Our Blessed Lord warned His followers against two then reigning evils; and the same reign at this day. Take heed and beware of the doctrine of the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees;* that is, of *atheism* and *hypocrisy,*—of a mere *formal religion,* or *none at all.*

Self-love, indeed, will be apt to be pleased, and place confidence in the outward duties of religion. The reason is

SERM. XXXI.

plain: there is not one of these outward duties, whether it be observing the *Sabbath*, or attending the *church*, or giving of *alms*, or *fasting*, or *praying*; any or all of these are easier to be performed than taking care of and changing the heart and life, which will require both *prayer*, and *pains*, and *self-denial*, and *watching*, to do it effectually.

Nay, let me tell you, that Satan himself will be well pleased that you should observe all the outward duties of religion, can he but prevail upon you to neglect that holiness of life without which, he knows, no man must see the Lord. This, assure yourselves, christians, is *one of the most subtile snares of the devil*, to tempt men to be satisfied with a shadow of religion without the power.

But then, as we ought not to place religion in a strict observance of these outward duties, and lay too great a stress upon them; so ought we to be very careful not to despise them, as too many do, as if we might be good christians without observing them. This is another snare of the devil, by which millions of souls have been ruined.

The public worship is most certainly a duty, and acceptable to God; and when our hearts go along with our bodies, all the outward ordinances are steps to lead us to what is absolutely necessary in religion; that is, a good life, a devout temper, and such as is necessary to fit us for a better world than this we live in.

Jesus Christ has appointed these ordinances, and His ministers to take care of them, in order to preserve His elect, whom He hath redeemed with His most precious blood. And dreadful, very dreadful, will be the judgment of all those who enjoy these means of grace and salvation, and are not bettered by them.

In one word: Men may perish in the use of those very ordinances which are appointed for their salvation. I will therefore conclude what I have already said with a few necessary truths, which I would hope you will remember, and carry home with you.

Remember then, that the end of coming to church ought to be a continual advance in piety, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Outward duties are a proper means of leading to conversion itself; therefore, let us see what effects these have upon our lives: otherwise we may go on in a round of outward duties all our life long, and be no nearer heaven when we come to die.

You hear the commands of God read to you; you beg Him to write them in your hearts, to pardon you when you have been so unhappy as to break any of them. Now, if all this is forgotten as soon as you leave the church, what can you expect, but that God will leave you to yourselves?

If you have confessed your sins with a true penitent heart, it will be seen by your life afterwards that you did so.

You have given God thanks for His mercies and blessings; take heed that you do not use any of them to His dishonour.

We bless ourselves, and we bless God, that we have the liberty of hearing His Word, and our duty, one day in seven. But pray take the word of Christ along with you; "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." Luke 11. 28. "Every tree" (saith our Lord) "is known by its fruit," and every christian by the manner of his life. Luke 6. 44.

Every christian may know whether he is in the way of salvation by such proofs as these following: He will carefully observe the outward duties of religion; he will, at the same time, take care that his heart go along with his outward actions; for by these he is known, by his heart, and by his life. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God;" that is, if we are not upright, we are not of God. 1 John 3. 10.

And now, to conclude what we have to say upon this subject.

We have been obliged to mention very often the necessity of *good purposes*, of a *good life*, of *good works*, of *good resolutions*. Let me not lead you into a mistake, as if these were in our own power, and owing to ourselves: so far from it, that they are the free gift of God, merited by our Lord Jesus Christ, for all such as in the sincerity of their hearts do pray for them.

To this place we come one day in seven, to pray for these graces and blessings. These, and all other blessings which

SERM. XXXI.

we stand in need of, God will surely grant us, if we ask them with a sincere purpose of glorifying Him in our lives and conversations; ever remembering, that a christian profession without a christian life, is like a tree that makes a great show, and flourisheth with leaves, but beareth no fruit, and therefore is fit only to be cut down and burnt.

May we all lay these things to heart, that when we come to the house of God, we may so *hear*, so *pray*, so *praise His holy name*, and *purpose* so *to live*, as that we return home every Lord's day with His blessing.

And this we beg for Jesus Christ His sake; to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXII.

SUCCESS OF ALL OUR LABOURS DEPENDS ON GOD'S BLESSING.

LUKE v. 4—7.

Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering, said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and filled both the ships.

HERE is, good christians, a very instructive passage of Holy Scripture. Here are people toiling and taking pains, and in an honest way, and yet without any success. This will teach us, that the success of all our labour and pains depends upon the will and pleasure of God. "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing."

Then here is, in Simon Peter, an instance of great resignation to the will of God; no fretting at their bad success, but waiting with patience for God's good time. Here is also an example of a well-grounded faith in God's power to favour those that depend on Him, even when they have the least hopes: "At Thy word I will let down the net." And this should teach us never to distrust the power or the goodness of God, but to live in a constant dependance upon Him, even then when our honest endeavours do not succeed.

For observe what follows: "When they had let down the net, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes; so many, as to fill both their ships;" which no doubt did convince them,

SERM. XXXII.

and should convince us, that *man liveth not by bread alone,* not by his own labour and industry only, (though these are necessary,) *but by the Word of God;* that is, by the blessing of God upon his labours.

[Matt. 4. 4.]

Lastly; here is an instance of great piety and gratitude for this great blessing. St. Peter falls down "at Jesus' feet, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" that is, I am verily unworthy of so great a favour; I acknowledge Thine infinite power, and infinite goodness; for nothing less than infinite power and goodness could work such a miracle.

[Luke 5. 8.]

But now, however plain and instructive these things are, and though in general every christian owns, that without the blessing of God no man can prosper; "that except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; that it is but lost labour to rise up early and late take rest," unless God be favourable unto their endeavours; that we are bound to depend upon God at all times; and to adore Him, even when He withholds His blessings; and that it is our bounden duty to be thankful when He bestows them upon us. Though this is owned by every christian, yet there are but too many who do not consider what this obliges them to.

[Ps. 127. 1, &c.]

Christians do not, for instance, always consider, that if we depend upon God's blessing, then should we never fail to ask His blessing; then should we never undertake any business which we have reason to believe He will not be pleased with; that we should never fret when we are disappointed in our expectations; and that we should never make an ill use of God's favours, whenever He sends them.

That these things are not well considered, is too plain from the practice of the world; where it is seldom enquired, —am I in the way of my duty? May I beg God's blessing upon this work or undertaking? Shall I injure no man by it? Shall I break none of God's laws, nor do dishonour to my Christian profession, if I succeed in it? A christian, who dare not ask himself such questions as these, may depend upon it, that whether he succeeds or not, he is in a bad way; he is doing that which he will one day repent of.

Now, it being certain, that every body wishes that his labours may be blessed with good success, and that most

people are impatient when they are disappointed in their expectations; it being certain also, that very many who do succeed in their labours and wishes are not always the better for it, and that it would have been a mercy to them if God had not answered them in their expectations; it will therefore be of use to us to enquire into these particulars: *First;* Why our expectations are not always answered, and our labours are not at all times blessed with good success? And *secondly;* What are the most likely means to prevail with God to bless all our honest endeavours?

Now, in the first place, though industry in our several callings be a duty, and a blessing is promised to it in several places of Holy Scripture, and generally speaking it is attended with good success; yet this is always to be understood with this condition, that God sees it meet, that it will be for His glory, and for our greater good. For God may, and very often does, deny success to our endeavours, for very many reasons.

To make us sensible of our own weakness and inability to help ourselves without His blessing; and to let us see "that neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth," (in comparison), "but God, Who giveth the increase." [1 Cor. 3. 7.]

God often disappoints our expectations, to make us more sensible of our dependance upon Him; to oblige us to go to Him at all times for help; to hinder us from sacrificing to our own net, as if all our success was owing to ourselves; to increase our faith, and hope, and patience, and other virtues; that we may depend upon His word and promises, wait His time which is always best, and cast all our care on Him Who careth for us. [Hab. 1. 16.]

There is another plain reason why men do not often succeed, even in their most honest employments. They undertake and follow their business without ever asking God's blessing; they labour and take pains, as if that alone would do; and God, Who knows that such as go about their business without His leave and blessing will, if they prosper, never thank Him for their success,—He therefore often blasts their labours, and makes all their endeavours fruitless.

This shews the great advantage and necessity of private and family prayers. For why should any person, or family,

SERM. XXXII.

expect that God should prosper them in the way they go, who will not so much as ask His protection and blessing. One may say, that such persons, such families, cannot prosper; or if they do for a while, it will be to their greater loss and sorrow.

Lastly; it is IN GREAT MERCY TO US, that God very often denies success to our labours. If, for instance, we are in *a bad way*, good success would but harden us, and encourage us to go on in sin; would but make us more wicked, and hasten our destruction. God is therefore undoubtedly merciful in hindering our succeeding in any evil way whatever. And if we are in *a good way*, and are in danger of abusing the favour of God (which He only knows), it must be owned to be the greatest goodness in Him to disappoint us; neither to hear our prayers for success, nor to prosper our labours.

For most certainly it had been better for millions of people, who are gone to give an account to God for the evil use they made of His favours, if He had withheld them; if all their endeavours had been blasted with ill success; if they had wanted that abundance which they made so ill use of; if they had lived and died as poor and miserable in the eye of the world as Lazarus. And they will, in the words of a Christian poet,

> ——— Bless *their* poverty, who had
> No reckonings to make when they are dead.

[chap. 4. 3.] "Ye ask (saith St. James), and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." And is it not a mercy not to be heard, when men make such petitions?

[Matt. 6. 13.] And does not God indeed answer our daily prayers, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," when He denies us success in such things as *He sees* would really hurt us, and hinder our salvation?

Prov. 23. 4, 5. The Wise man's advice would now seem very strange to most ears; "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom;" for that will suggest to thee that riches are a mighty blessing: but, adds he, they will deceive thee at last, "For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." And is not God kind to those

whose wishes for riches and abundance He denies, and so prevents the greatest vexation which men suffer in being deprived of them?

But then if we consider what our Lord has made known to us; that riches are a mighty hindrance in our way to heaven; that it is the hardest thing in the world to have them, and not to trust in them; that they who receive all the good things in this world which their riches afford them, will be tormented in the text. Whoever considers this will be convinced, sure, that God is indeed merciful to all those to whom He denies that success which would be their everlasting ruin.

After all; as it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade even the best christians to believe this; and as there is scarce one in a thousand who will be convinced that there is so much danger as God has declared in having our wishes for abundance fulfilled, God is therefore forced to disappoint those who fear Him, and for whom He has greater mercies in store; and a time will come when they shall see and confess the kindness of God in denying them that success in all things which they so passionately desired and laboured for.

But are we not, therefore, to labour and pray for success upon our honest endeavours? Are we not to be careful in our business, and diligent in our callings? Yes; most certainly. God, from the creation, designed man for business; He put Adam into the garden of Eden, to dress and to keep it. And though we are taught to pray for our daily bread, yet every man is bound to do something towards obtaining it, or else he may *starve*, and ought to do so. "If any man (saith the Apostle) "will not work," will not take some pains in his generation, "neither ought he to eat." [2 Thess. 3. 10.]

And this will bring us, in the second place, to consider *what are the most proper means to prevail with God so to bless our endeavours, as that they may prosper;* and that we may be able to give a comfortable account of our time and labours to our great Master.

Our first care then must be, that whatever business we undertake be just; that it be in the way of our duty; that it be reasonable, and like to end well; for a man can expect no

SERM. XXXII.

blessing of God, no good issue, if his aims are unlawful, if he is out of the way of his calling, or if he undertakes things at random, and without good grounds.

Our next care must be, that we undertake and pursue the works of our calling with a conscientious regard to God and to His laws, without which, we have no reason to expect His blessing, either upon our endeavours, or upon the fruit of our labour. "At Thy word, (saith St. Peter,) I will let down the net." So ought every christian to say, *At Thy word,* and because Thou hast commanded me, I will be true and just in all my dealings; *at Thy word,* and because I cannot hope to prosper without Thy blessing, I will use no deceitful ways to increase my substance; I will be ruled by *Thy word,* and not by my own corrupt desires, or by the practice or customs of an evil world; at *Thy will* and *word* I will act, and at *Thy word* I will forbear.

The Apostle therefore justly rebukes those who are so foolish and wicked as to lay down projects of what they will do hereafter, without ever saying, *if the Lord will,* we will do this or that. And God Himself threatens those with disappointment and bad success in all their undertakings, who trust in an arm of flesh, and neglect to call upon Him for a blessing upon their labours.

As therefore we hope for His blessing, let us take the
Phil. 4. 6. Apostle's advice, "In every thing," in all the affairs of life, "let your requests be made known unto God;" that is, pray unto Him, that whatever business you go about may be for His glory and your advantage; that He would direct you both in the choice of what is good, and in the way of doing it; ever
[Jer.10.23.] remembering, "that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

By doing this, *we consecrate all our labours to God;* and without doing so, all that we do is profane; for it is doing it on presumption that we need not His help, His guidance, and blessing, but that we can do without them.

Lastly; as we hope to prosper in all our ways, we must shew that our dependance is upon God's blessing, not only by our *words,* but by our *deeds;* that is, by assigning a portion of our *time,* and of our *labours,* to His service;—these being the only public acknowledgments that men can make

of their dependance upon God, such as they can be sure will be accepted. For let a man spend never so much time in his private devotions, if notwithstanding he neglects to keep holy the Lord's day; and let a man be never so liberal to the poor, yet if he refuses to give the tenth to God (for it is to God, and for His service it is given), he has no testimony of his dependance upon God to shew; or that he owns that it is to the goodness of God that he is indebted for *all his time*, for the fruits of the earth, and the blessings of the seas.

This was what God required of His own people; and when once they began to think these proportions of their time and labours too much for God, they then found, by experience, that it was not *time* and *labour* that made men happy and prosperous, but the blessing of God upon such as obeyed His commands.

It is for this reason that christians, as well as the jews, are obliged to set apart one day in seven to think upon God, and to serve Him, as one great means of obtaining and securing His favour and blessing. And it was for the same reason, that our pious ancestors thought themselves bound, even by the laws of the Gospel, to dedicate the tithe of all their labours to God, as a public acknowledgment that they hold of Him, and depend upon His blessing.

And let any christian but read the third chapter of Malachi, and he will be convinced, that there is no surer way of obtaining an abundant blessing upon our labours, than by a conscientious payment of tithes, and by a religious observation of the Sabbath day. He will see, for instance, that when men neglect this duty, they are said "to be gone away from the ordinances of God;" that it is no less a crime than "robbing of God;" that it is one great cause of public calamities; and lastly, to keep close to this duty, is the way to prevail with God to pour down His blessings upon us; and that there shall be a difference so visible, that men shall easily discern betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not, by the favours He shews them.

I will conclude this particular with the words of Haggai the Prophet, [ch. i. 5, 6.] "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways: Ye have sown much and bring in little;

SERM. XXXII.

ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes;" that is, Ye are disappointed in every thing ye expect or do: and God Himself gives the reason, [ver. 9.] "When ye brought it home, I did blow upon it;" and why?—"because His house and service were neglected."

We shall now consider, *what useful inferences and observations* may be made from this history, and from what has been said upon it. For this we may be assured of, that this miracle was not recorded so much for our *admiration*, as for our *instruction*.

And in the first place, this portion of Scripture concerns *us* of the Ministry in an especial manner. "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing," saith St. Peter; and it is certain, all our pains to instruct and to convert others will signify very little, if God gives not His blessing. And he that hopes to do any good by his sermons, and other instructions, without most ardent prayers to God to bless his labours, will too likely labour to no purpose; but whatever becomes of his flock, he will be in danger of losing himself.

"Nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net:" so that if God gives the word, a blessing *will* follow, let the instrument He makes use of be never so weak, and the success never so unlikely.

Let no man therefore, who calls himself a christian, undertake any business whatever, where he cannot hope, and with confidence pray God that His blessing may go along with him. What a world of evil and wickedness would this prevent? And what an easy rule is this, by which every body may know whether the business he is about be lawful or not. If a man dare not beg God to prosper him in the way he goes, he may depend upon it, that his way is perverse in the sight of God. So that the most ignorant would not need to be told, that such and such things are unlawful, and that a curse will attend them; his own conscience will tell him, that if he dare not pray for success, success will be a sin and a curse to him.

Let us remember, in the next place, that *success* in our

undertakings is not always a sign of God's blessing. "An inheritance" (saith the wise man) "may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed." [Prov. 20. 21.] Nor are *riches* a certain proof of God's favour: They are sometimes given as a curse and a punishment; they are often given as a temptation and a trial; and they are always dangerous things, let them fall into never so good hands. It behoves, therefore, all christians to consider, how they desire them, how they get them, and what use they make of them.

But especially, christians should consider, that there can be no security, no true satisfaction, in the enjoyment of any thing that is got either by fraud, or by violence, or by injustice; by over-reaching of others, or taking advantage of their ignorance, or of their necessities. For let a man get never so much, if in the doing it he displease God, he is sure to be a loser in the end.

Therefore one would give this good advice to parents and to all others, never to lay up any thing for their children and posterity, which they are not verily persuaded was got by God's blessing upon their honest endeavours; it will be but a curse, and a snare, and a vexation, to them to whom they leave it.

Let us never envy those that prosper in their business better than we do, nor be troubled when our honest endeavours are not blessed with good success. But let us lay down this for a truth, that God will always do what is best for them that fear Him, and trust in His goodness; that He governs all events, and that nothing happens without His knowledge.

God has blessings enough ready to bestow upon us, when He, Who only knows, sees it best for us. He can make the earth fruitful, the seasons good, and the seas yield their store; and He can put a stop to these blessings, when we abuse them, when we set our hearts upon them, when we fall into a worldly temper, and forget *that* God by Whom we live, and from Whom we hope for better things hereafter.

In all our worldly business, therefore, let us ever remember, that we have another life to provide for as well as this; and to set it home upon our hearts, let us also re-

SERM. XXXII.

member the words of our Saviour on another occasion: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" [Matt. 16. 26.]

We learn from our Lord Himself, that the most lawful business may hinder our salvation, and shut us out of heaven. When, for instance, we prefer worldly business to the care of the soul; then the most lawful employment becomes a *sin*, and a *snare*, and a *curse*. We are assured from His own mouth, that the care of oxen, of the farm, and of the family, when they hinder men from serving and obeying *this* call, will as surely shut them out of heaven, as the most notorious crimes.

On the other hand, there is a way by which all the actions of our lives may become acceptable to God. When, for instance, they are done in obedience to Him; when we pray Him to direct and to bless us in all our ways; when we have an eye to His commands in all we undertake; when we own His hand in all we do: and give Him thanks for every blessing we receive.

In short, whoever expects, one day, to hear those joyful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," must be sure to have his master's will always in his mind, and an eye to the account he is to give of all his actions. This will hinder us from following our own corrupt inclinations; from being too eagerly bent upon worldly goods; from following the way of a wicked world in getting them right or wrong; from spending them upon our lusts; and from forgetting the Lord that made us. Matt. 25. 21, &c.

To conclude the whole. If people fret when they are disappointed, it is because they do not firmly believe that God ordereth all things for the best. If men are eagerly desirous of the good things of this world, it is because they have not fixed this truth in their hearts, that this life is only a passage to another, to a much better or a much worse. If christians are over glad when the world favours them, it is a sure sign that they know not the dangers they are exposed to by having the desires of their hearts granted. And lastly, if people make an ill use of God's favours, then they are no longer favours, but snares and temptations, and to be dreaded, rather than enjoyed.

And the conclusion will be, that no man ever was or ever will be happy, who goes out of the way of his duty to increase his substance; or who will not be persuaded that *God's Providence is our best inheritance.*

Grant, O God! that we may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that we may at last come to the land of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour, adoration, and praise, world without end.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE PERPLEXITY AND DANGER OF THE DOUBLE-MINDED.

JAMES i. 8.

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

See Matt. 6. 24; Heb. 10. 23; James 4. 4; 1John 2. 24.

A DOUBLE-MINDED man; that is, a man who has two minds or wills, one for *God*, and another for the *world;* a mind, or desire to go to heaven, and yet a great desire for every satisfaction this life can afford; such a man is *unstable, doubtful, perplexed, unsettled in all his ways,* or all his life long.

Now, does any body doubt that this is not the character of most men? And perhaps of very many who are looked upon to be very good christians, and in the sure way to heaven?

I appeal to the consciences of all that hear me, if this has not been their case, if it be not so now? Whether their hearts are not frequently divided betwixt the love of virtue and the pleasures of sense? Whether they are not one while under the power of religion, and another under the dominion of sin? He must know very little of himself and of religion, who is not sensible of this struggle; and he must still have a less value for his own happiness, who does not desire, *at least,* to bring his mind to a greater certainty, and to resolve one way or other, either that the care of his soul ought to be his great concern, or that he may follow the desires of his heart, and the ways of the world, without any great hazard.

A very little consideration, one would think, might convince any man, that if religion (as we all seem to believe) be necessary to obtain the favour of God, and to escape that

punishment which our sins have deserved, why then so much *must* be necessary as may enable us to obtain those ends. And yet, as easy as it is to see this, people will not be persuaded, but that a great deal less religion and concern for their souls will serve their turn than God hath expressly required; and are but too apt (with those mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy) to "bless themselves in their hearts, chap. 29. 19. saying, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts." Notwithstanding the dreadful curse there pronounced against all that shall thus flatter themselves.

I know not, therefore, whether one can do a greater service to the souls of men, than to endeavour to set this matter in *a true light;* that such as have any true concern for themselves may be convinced how very dangerous it is, as well as perplexing, *to have two minds* or hearts, one for God and another for the world; since the man, whose character this is, is as sure to be undone as if he had no religion at all.

To be more effectually convinced of this, let us *first* consider, that God, being the author of all good to us, expressly requires this of us, *that we should love Him with all our heart and soul;* that this love should prevail over all other passions, and should direct us *in all our ways*. And if the love of God *rule in our hearts, these will certainly be the effects:* We shall desire to know the will of God, that we may obey Him more faithfully; we shall fear nothing so much as to displease Him: we shall check our hearts when they run out upon things that cannot profit us. In one word, we shall keep our minds intent upon the place and happiness we were made for, that we may not wander out of our way upon every temptation we meet with.

Now, this is that *single eye, that singleness of heart,* so much recommended by the Spirit of God; by which we are able to make a right judgment of things; by which we are able to see, that the happiness of heaven ought to be our chief aim; that we cannot serve and please God as we ought to do, if our hearts are too much set upon the things of this present world; that if we are distracted betwixt *self-love* and the *love of God,* we shall be miserable both *here* and *hereafter;* and that, how far soever we come short of this *single-*

SERM. XXXIII.

ness of mind, so far we shall come short of that peace and happiness we strive for.

For this is God's gracious design in disappointing us so constantly, whenever we look for happiness any where but in Him, *and in the knowledge of His ways;* that finding nothing but uneasiness in every thing else, we may at last think fit to seek for peace where it *may* be found, namely, *in the way of God's commandments.*

And having once surrendered our hearts and affections, and all that belongs to us, into the hands of God, we shall then find by experience, that *this* only can give us peace of mind and conscience in the midst of a distracted world; this only can moderate all our eager desires after things uncertain and perishable; this only can make us content under the disappointments and crosses, which, by the providence of God, we so often meet with; and lastly, this, *and this only,* can make the thoughts of *death* tolerable to flesh and blood. In short, this is to follow the advice of our blessed Lord, [Matt. 6. 33.] "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness;" to the observance of which He has promised all other blessings,—the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come.

The double-minded man, as his character is, so is his condition, opposite to this we have just mentioned. He dares not for his life have no religion; and yet he cannot find in his heart to give up himself entirely to God's service. He confesses that it is reasonable, and his interest, to take care of his soul; and yet the pleasures or the business of life will not suffer him to do it in good earnest. If he prays to God, it is out of custom, and not for grace to make him better. He consults his own inclinations in every thing he does; and, while he does so, he knows that he shall never get out of this snare.

One need not describe the unhappiness of such a state of life, which makes a man always displeased and weary with himself; afraid of danger, and yet not resolved to take the way to escape it; striving to avoid the sight of himself, because of the confusion and disorder he finds in his own breast; one while purposing to break through all things that oppose his conversion, and presently diverted by new temp-

tations; wondering at his own inconstancy; lamenting his condition, wishing it were otherwise; resolving to take up for good and all, and soon forgetting his good purposes.

I appeal to your experience, whether this is not the case of very many, who notwithstanding hope that all will be well with them at the last.

But I am afraid they have not well considered the *extreme danger of such a state.* Let us but represent to ourselves a mind *faintly resolved* to live as becomes the Gospel, and strongly inclined to the desires of the body,—a man who has made a thousand resolutions of reforming, and yet has kept none of them, or but very imperfectly. Let us suppose (what is really true), that the longer he has gone on in this uncertain way, the greater difficulty he will still find to do what he purposeth: let us further suppose (and it is what generally happens), that he will thus go on *resolving*, and *doing nothing* in good earnest, till death surpriseth him, unprepared for so great a change. And can I describe, or you imagine, a case more desperate or lamentable? And yet (such is our blindness) this is too often the case of those who will not believe they are in danger, only because they fully resolve not to die in that condition; and yet they *do* die in that condition, because they do not apprehend the danger of living in it.

And indeed, the danger is greater for this very reason, that it is not *feared.* Great and crying sins, like great and bloody wounds, make people uneasy, until they have taken some care about them: and yet, after all, a state of indifference, a general neglect of duty and religion, *like a gangrene that is scarce perceived*, is as hard to be cured, and makes a man as incapable of salvation, as the most scandalous vices.

Now, this being really the case of an infinite number of people, who, because they are not scandalously lewd or profane; because they are sometimes awakened with a sense of their sins, and lament their infirmities; because they often wish they were better, and faintly purpose to overcome the sloth that hinders their sincere conversion; they do therefore hope there is no *great danger:* when, God knows, there are none *so far from salvation*, as those that are fallen into a way of *repenting, and returning to their sins again.*

I wish it were in my power to represent unto you, and to

SERM. XXXIII.

myself, the infinite *guilt and danger of such a state,* in which (while a man continues in it) he abuses the goodness of God, makes a mock of the means of grace, does despite to the Holy Spirit, and is in the greatest hazard of being abandoned of God. For the great aggravation of *this sin* is *this,* that a man cannot plead either *ignorance* or *inability.* If he did not *know* religion to be necessary, he would not do what he does; and if it be necessary, why does he do so little? And if the Spirit of God has enabled a man to do any thing that is good, it should convince him, that if he is not able to do *every thing* that is required of him, it is because he does not, in good earnest, *pray to God to make him both willing and able.*

The truth is, we have a great desire to go to heaven; but then we do not take pains to be convinced, that *without an holy life* we cannot possibly go to heaven. Nay, we often endeavour to impose upon ourselves, and *strive* to believe, that an holy life is *not* necessary at all times; but that one may love God and the world by turns, without any ill consequence; and that this is what people generally do, who yet hope to be happy when they die.

Now, this is a *delusion* which one should oppose with all one's might: and the way to do it *effectually* is, to find out the *cause* of this dangerous disorder, that one may be able to propose *a proper cure.*

And if we seriously consider it, we shall find this *double mind,* and the *inconstancy* and *unsettledness* that attends it, proceeds first and chiefly *from the want of a true and lively faith.* For *faith* being the *foundation of religion,* where that is weak or rotten, it is impossible that the religion that is built upon it should be certain or lasting. If we do not believe what we pretend, it is no wonder if we *are not* what we *profess* to be—*sincere christians.*

A man therefore, who would not deceive himself in a matter of so great concern, would do well to consider, why he is at the trouble of doing any thing that religion requires of him? Why, for example, he worships God at all? Why he is sometimes serious, and begs pardon for his offences? Why at any time he resolves to keep God's commandments? If we would commune *thus* with our own hearts, we should

often find, that we do this, not because *we firmly believe the great truths of religion,* (for no man who has these much at heart can possibly be *double-minded* and *unstable;*) but *we take up resolutions of being religious,* either upon some melancholy accident, some solemn occasion, some fit of devotion, or, it may be, upon the apprehensions of some approaching danger.

Now, these are motives which very probably will not last long; and then the good purposes which are occasioned by them are sure to be soon forgotten, and *sin* by turns gets the mastery.

And yet, after a man has acted this part a thousand times, he will hardly be persuaded, but that his *faith* is *sound* and as it should be. He saith, *that he believes the Gospel,* and yet he takes *little care of his soul:* why then he does *not believe the Gospel;* for the Gospel tells us plain enough, that if we do not work out our salvation with *fear* and *trembling,* (that is, with a carefulness and concern becoming so great a stake,) we shall certainly be ruined. A man may believe that these are the words of the Gospel, and yet live in great unconcernedness; but it cannot be said, with truth, that his *faith* is what it should be.

Another cause of this inconstancy is, *a wilful ignorance of the corruption of our nature.* It is evident enough, that our inclinations to evil are more powerful than to good: now if we are ignorant of this, or if we do not lay it to heart; how shall we look out for help to enable us to overcome the evil bent of our own will? It is this that has ruined millions before us: they would not see and acknowledge their own *weakness, blindness, proneness to evil;* and therefore they were not concerned to ask help from God, nor accept it when graciously offered them.

Another cause of this evil is, *a too great confidence in our own strength and resolutions.* It is strange, after all, that we, who every moment meet with proofs of our own weakness and inconstancy, should yet *depend upon ourselves.* If we see another man fickle, we *know* he is not to be depended upon, and accordingly we put no confidence in him; we know ourselves to be so, and yet we hope we may depend upon ourselves, though this presumption has always *ruined* those that do so.

SERM. XXXIII.

I shall only mention one other cause of our inconstancy, and that is, *a most scandalous neglect of the means of grace, appointed and afforded us by God, for overcoming all difficulties, and occasions of sin.* "Without Me ye can do nothing," saith Jesus Christ. Do we act as if we did indeed believe this? Do we, distrusting ourselves, *watch and pray that we fall not into temptation?* Do we *search the Scriptures,* as if we did believe that in them *we have eternal life proposed to us?* Do we preserve in our hearts a sense of our dependence upon God, by *praying* to Him for what we want, and giving Him *thanks* for His favours? Do we consider *repentance* as a means of escaping the snare of the devil, and therefore a reason why we should *sin no more, lest we find no more place for repentance?* Do we look upon *mortification* and *self-denial* as absolutely necessary for a disciple of Jesus Christ? Do we submit to *discipline,* as if *they that have the rule over us did, in truth, watch for our souls?*

John 15. 5.

[Matt. 26. 41.]

[John 5. 39.]

[Heb. 12. 17.]

[Heb. 13. 17.]

It is because christians have little or no regard for these precepts of the Gospel, that their religion is *uncertain,* and that they are *unstable in all their ways.*

And it is utterly impossible we should ever be *serious,* and *constant,* and *sincere,* in the profession of Christianity, until we take away these *causes* of our *carelessness* and *inconstancy;* until, in the *first place,* we possess our hearts with a *true and lively faith;* for according to our faith so shall it be with us.

My meaning is this: the most effectual way to *prevent* or to *cure* this *double-mindedness* will be, *to keep our minds intent upon those motives or reasons which first inclined us to be serious and thoughtful for our latter end:* the *fear,* for instance, of being for ever undone; the *hopes* of being happy for ever in heaven; the *goodness and love of God,* Who has the compassion of a Father for us, notwithstanding our rebellion: *these considerations* (while they are warm in our hearts) will not suffer us to be *unconcerned, double-minded,* and *trifling,* when we see that our souls are at stake.

But *here* is our misfortune: we hear the Gospel; we believe what is said of the happiness and misery of the world to come; we are awakened by these truths which so nearly concern us, and we resolve to live as becomes such a faith;

and so far it is well with us. The seed is sown, but then if it happen to *fall among thorns, the thorns grow up,* that is, the *cares,* or the *pleasures of this world choke the word;* they divert the mind, and hinder the *will* from hearkening to what the conscience would direct to be done; which is the true reason why we are sometimes very serious, and sometimes very little concerned, for our soul's welfare. [Matt. 13. 22; Luke 8. 14.]

But, for God's sake, let us not deceive ourselves. If, when I lay things to heart, I see *by faith* a necessity of being seriously religious, why then there is still the same necessity, though I do not always see it, nor live as if I believed it.

In short, *eternal happiness,* and *eternal misery,* are very serious things; and if a man who will say I wish I could be as serious as I should be, would but say, *I will often think of what will become of me when I die,* such a man would soon be serious, there is no doubt of it.

It is true, to be able to *say,* and to *do* this, will require a *lively faith,* such as will awaken the *conscience,* work upon the *will,* call back the affections from closing with the world; and, to preserve such a *degree of faith,* a man must *watch,* and *pray,* and *deny himself,* and strive to keep a *pure heart;* all which are very contrary to flesh and blood. But then, *it is for our life.* Let *that* be seriously considered, and no difficulties will discourage us.

And let us, in the next place, endeavour to possess our hearts with a just sense of *the corruption of our nature.* He must be very blind who does not see, and very perverse who does not own this, when it is with so great difficulty that we are brought to comply with the will of God; when we can hear of heaven and hell, and be indifferent; when we can see our interest, and neglect it; when we can resist so many motives of loving God, and make all His designs for our conversion ineffectual. All these are sad proofs of a state *of deep corruption.* The knowledge of which is most proper to awaken us, and fill our souls with concern, that we may not flatter ourselves with being secure, when we are *prone to evil continually;* that we may fly to God for help, and cheerfully comply with the methods He has ordained for our recovery; that we may admire the goodness of God, who had pity upon us in our distress, and make *this* a lasting reason of *loving*

SERM. XXXIII.

Him with all our hearts; always remembering, that to lament our condition, without desiring to be reformed, will not excuse but increase our guilt, since all our ailments may be cured, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

But then, *we must not depend upon ourselves;* that, indeed, would be the way to miscarry. "Happy is the man that feareth always;" that distrusteth his own wisdom and strength, and looks up to, and depends upon God. And we shall be apt to do so, if we call to mind how often our *best purposes* have been forgotten, our most *solemn vows* broken, and very *hopeful beginnings* come to nothing. Thus it always *has* been, and thus it always *will* be, until, out of a deep sense of our own weakness, we give up ourselves into the hands of our Creator, Who has a right to govern His creatures, and Who never designed us for self-government and independence.

[Prov. 28. 14.]

And, therefore, *as we hope for security, we must make use of those means which He has appointed* for confirming us in His grace.

And here let us not delude ourselves, and depend upon what will not profit us: such are, a *good faith* without a suitable life; *confessing our sins,* without avoiding temptations; *fruitless purposes,* without taking care to amend; *formal devotions,* which never affect the heart; *imploring God's assistance,* without using our own endeavours; *pretending to love God,* when we love the world above all things; *hearing His Word,* without thinking of obeying His laws: these may serve to harden our hearts, but can never confirm us in the grace of God.

But if we would set about the work of our salvation with the seriousness of people who hope to go to heaven, we must suffer our *faith* to set before us the *happiness* and the *miseries* of the world to come; we must strive with all our might that nothing may divert us from thinking often upon these important subjects, which are the foundation of Christian constancy. For having these before our eyes, we shall not so easily return to the sins we have repented of; for we know who has told us what a sad state that man is in, to whom an evil spirit returns, after he has been turned out, "with seven other spirits worse than himself." We shall

[Luke 11. 26.]

therefore watch against such *backsliding;* we shall pray with the concern of people that are in the midst of dangers; and we shall lose no opportunity of gaining or improving those graces which are so necessary for our security: and above all, we shall commit ourselves and our cause to God every day of our lives, beseeching Him, that as often as we forget ourselves (which we are but too apt to do), that He would awaken us into a lively concern for our salvation.

To conclude. "Let us use all diligence to make our calling and election sure." [2 Pet. 1. 10.] And since we know *by faith* that our souls are to live for ever, let us put on resolutions worthy of the *faith we profess*—a *faith* which undertakes to enable us to break our bonds, though never so strong; which will deliver us from the powers of darkness, set us free from the *bondage of corruption,* and put an end at last to that *struggle* betwixt *nature* and *grace,* which every christian, who has any knowledge of himself, is sadly sensible of.

If the Spirit of God gives us good desires, let us heartily close with them, and remember, that He is not bound to strive with us for ever; that whatever we think now, if ever we grieve and drive Him from us, all our good designs and desires will vanish, and leave us most pitiable subjects of misery.

The good God keep it ever in the hearts of all His servants, that it is *an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord;* [Jer. 2. 19.] keep us from presumptuous sins; preserve us always in a serious temper; that being ever mindful of our infirmities and backslidings, we may be more watchful, more diligent, and more importunate for grace: continually mortifying our corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in virtue and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O Lord, increase my faith! Let me firmly believe myself what I teach others. Let my faith be truly practical. Pity and awaken all that hold the truth in unrighteousness; have compassion upon the infidel world; for Christ's sake, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Amen.

Tit. i. 16.

See Luke 13. 26; Acts 8. 13; Rom. 1. 18; 5. 1; 2 Cor. 5. 17; 2 Tim. 3. 5; Tit. 3. 8; James 2. 18, 24.

They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him; being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate; [that is, *void of judgment.*]

If one should say to any christian, *Deny your God,* or your *Saviour,* or your *faith;* he would *tremble,* he would *abhor* the proposal, and him that made it. He would answer, What! would you have me go directly to hell? And yet, you hear, there are those who "profess to know God, but in their works deny Him;" and the Apostle assures us, that such are as *abominable,* as hated of God, as if they denied

2 Pet. 2. 1. Him with their mouths. And St. Peter speaks of some who are so deplorably fallen from grace "as to deny the Lord that

Jude ver. 4. bought them." And St. Jude saith expressly that men of corrupt lives give evident proofs of their apostasy, "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." And lastly;

Tim. 5. 8. St. Paul assures us, that such as are cruel and uncharitable to their own kindred that are poor, "have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels."

What are we to learn from all this? Why surely, *to be afraid for ourselves;* lest any of us, while we tremble at the name of apostasy, should live in the practice of such works

as are the sure marks of apostasy; lest, while we confess Christ with the tongue, we renounce Him in our lives.

Now, one cannot think of a more effectual way, by the grace of God, to prevent this, than to put christians in mind, and to make them understand, *what it is they profess to believe;* that whenever they do things contrary to their faith and profession, their consciences may fly in their faces, and make them uneasy, and afraid of the danger and ruin that attends them; which will be one good step towards repentance and amendment of life.

I will therefore set before you the words of *that Creed* which we so often repeat; or those things which every christian declares he believes, and is persuaded of the truth of; and then we shall more easily see, what works are contrary to such a profession; that is, by what works we deny our God and our faith. We shall also see, how necessary every word of this faith is to a Christian life; how we ought to apply the several parts of the Creed, *and put them in practice;* and how we may judge of the sincerity of our faith, by the manner of our life.

These are the things which, by God's assistance, I am now going to explain to you; and which I desire you will attend to, as things which very much concern every soul of us.

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I believe; that is, I am as fully persuaded of the following truths, as I am of the truth of any thing that I see with my eyes.

For instance: I am as verily persuaded *that there is a God* —a Being above this world, and Who has created all other beings,—as I am of my own being; and I find, that I resist and do violence to my reason and conscience, if I go about to stifle or deny the belief of a God.

I am therefore as truly persuaded of the *almighty power* of God,—that with God nothing is impossible,—as if I had seen Him make the world. I believe also, that by the same almighty power He still *governs,* and *preserves,* and *takes care* of, every thing that He has made, with infinite *wisdom, justice,* and *goodness.*

This appears in a more especial manner with regard to men; for God having, from the beginning, given them laws;

SERM. XXXIV.

He has either *punished* or *rewarded* them, in all ages, according as they obeyed or broke those laws: an account of which we have *in the Holy Scriptures,* the most certain history in the world, an history which, if seriously attended to, will instruct us in all the perfections of God, His *infinite power,* His *wisdom,* His *justice,* His *truth,* and His *goodness,* and will establish us in the firm belief of them.

For example: We see *the infinite power of God,* in the manner of His making the world, and in the manner it was [Ps. 148. 5.] afterwards destroyed by the flood. "He spake the word only, and all things were made; He commanded and they were created." And by the same word they were afterwards destroyed.

And then for *the infinite goodness of God,* this appears in this affecting instance especially: when man had broken the covenant of his God, and had thereby lost all hopes of eternal happiness, God was so good as to enter into a new covenant with him, by which he may attain eternal life and happiness, if it is not his own fault.

At the same time, I cannot but be convinced, that *God is infinitely holy;* that He hates all sin, and the workers of iniquity; because I find Him every where, and in all ages, punishing sin without respect of persons.

That *God is infinitely just,* I believe, and am assured of, because He has given most righteous laws; and because He renders to every man according to his doings; condemning the wicked and justifying the righteous.

That *God is true and faithful* to His word and promises, and that His servants may depend upon His word with the greatest assurance, we cannot but believe, forasmuch as we find in all the Scriptures, that not one thing has failed of all that God ever promised:—All came to pass.

And lastly, we believe, that *God sees and knows every thing* that passes in the world; that His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; that there is no place where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from His sight; and that the very thoughts and intents of our hearts are all known to God.

Now, these are the things which we profess to believe, when we repeat this part of our Creed. Would to God we

could say with truth, that the generality of christians do not contradict all this in their lives; that they do not, in effect, deny the Almighty *power, wisdom, justice, knowledge,* and *goodness* of *God,* by their works!

I will set the truth plainly before you, and let every man judge for himself.

And in the first place, every man who lives without God in the world; that is, who leads a careless life, and lives at all adventures, without considering why he came into the world, what it is which God expects of him, what will become of him when he dies; every such person most certainly *forgets,* and in effect *denies,* that God made him, and that He made him for His glory.

So does every one who is more afraid of man than he is of God; who will venture to do what he knows will displease God, for fear of some worldly loss. Such a one considers not the almighty power of God; that He is able to recompense sufficiently those who suffer any loss for His sake; and that He is able to punish, with the greatest severity, those who fear not His displeasure, nor pay regard unto His laws.

If a man will do that in secret, which he would be ashamed or afraid to do in the sight of men, let him *never so often* profess to believe, that God is every where present, and sees all things that are done, it is plain he denies it in his works, and will one day find to his cost, "that all things were naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." [Heb.4.15.]

What will it avail a christian to say, every day of his life, that he believes in a God *infinitely just,* if at the same time he takes no care not to make this *great* and *just* God his enemy? If he takes no care to reconcile himself to God, by a timely and a sincere repentance, for the sins by which he has offended Him?

I may say with my lips, that I believe in God, Who is *infinitely holy,* and Who therefore cannot but be displeased with every thing that is wicked or impure; but then, I have no right to be believed when I say this, if I am not careful to keep at the greatest distance from all temptations to sins of impurity.

We call God OUR FATHER; but then we may depend upon it, He will *not* own us for His children, if, in our lives

SERM. XXXIV.

and works, we resemble the devil; if we dare not trust in His fatherly love and care for us; if we will not submit to what He ordereth for our good; if we will not mind what will please Him; never ask Him for what we want, nor thank Him for the life which He has given us, and the means of preserving it. By doing this, we disown Him for our Father; we disinherit ourselves; and the *knowledge* and the *belief* of God the Father will only be a curse to us.

This being the case of all those "who profess to know God, but in works deny Him;" who are not to be distinguished by their lives and actions from the very heathens who know not God; and who neither *fear*, nor *love*, nor *worship* Him as they ought to do; let us consider the cause of this malady, and endeavour to apply a proper remedy.

Now, FAITH being the foundation of all true religion, of all other graces and qualifications for happiness, let every man who hopes for happiness, in the first place, beg of God *this most necessary grace*, and an increase of it daily; a grace without which it is impossible to please God.

In the next place, that we may lead a life worthy of the faith we profess, and of the hopes we *all* have of being happy; let us endeavour to have the several articles of our Creed always present, as much as possible, in our minds.

For, most certainly, the only reason why christians live without uneasiness in the practice of any known sin is, because they *forget*, they do not attend to, the truths they pretend to believe. For, would christians (as holy David professes he did) "set God always before them," they would, as he did, bitterly repent of the sins they had committed; and, by an holy example, make amends for the offence they had given.

Ps. 16. 8.

Let us therefore not be afraid to *consider*, and to keep in our minds, what it is we believe of God; and we shall soon see the good effects of doing so. It will not only put us in mind of our duty and of our interest, but will be a most powerful means of leading us to close with and to practise it.

For instance: "I believe in God the Father, Who made me and all the world." Let me not only *say*, but calmly *consider* this. Why then I stand indebted to God for my being; for every thing I *have*, or *value*, or *hope for*. If I

stood half so much obliged to any man living, I should highly value him, I should love him, I should strive to please him, I should take all occasions to thank him for his favours, and I should never willingly offend him. And why not this to Thee, my God, my Maker, my Benefactor?

But what did God make me for? Not, sure, to lead an idle, useless life; I cannot believe *that:* that would not be for His honour. No. But He made me to manifest in me His glorious perfections; His *power* in creating me; His *providence* in preserving me; His *bounty* in providing for me; His *wisdom* in giving me the very best rules to live by; His *goodness* in promising to reward my poor endeavours to please Him; and His *holiness* and *justice* in punishing the breach of His most righteous laws.

This is what every christian professes to believe to be the end of his creation:—To glorify God, by living as becomes a creature of so great, so just, so holy, so good, so bountiful a Creator.

And it must be great unthoughtfulness, when any christian acts contrary to these ends. For let but a man consider with himself,—the life which God has given me, is not mine to dispose of; it is the Almighty God, Who sent me into the world, there to stay just as long as He shall think fit; I dare not therefore, for my soul, attempt to leave my station, till He commands me; I will not shorten that life, which God has given me, by debauchery and intemperance; I will not, I dare not, run the hazard of losing my life on any account whatever, but only when it shall be for the glory of my Maker.

And then when I consider, as I ought very often to do, *that I was made to glorify God,* by doing good in my generation, and by living as becomes the relation I have to Him, calling Him my Father, as often as I say my prayers, or repeat my Creed: when I remember this, I shall be ashamed and blush to be found doing any thing which may dishonour my Father and my God.

But if this consideration does not hinder me from doing a base or vile thing, there is another which sure ought to restrain me: The God whom I shall provoke by this wicked action, I believe Him to be *Almighty,* and that "He can

SERM. XXXIV.

[Matt. 10. 28.] destroy both body and soul in hell." There is no passion, no pleasure, no desire of gain, of revenge, no temptation whatever, which this consideration, if attended to, will not damp and deaden.

It is true, temptations are sometimes too sudden and too violent to permit us to make the comparison betwixt the pleasure of sin, and the eternal punishment that is to follow it: but then it is as true, that it is our own fault, that we do not sufficiently think of this when we are in a temper for doing it; and that we do not seriously beg of God to *deliver us from evil*;—of God, Who is Almighty to save, as well as to punish.

Our faith furnisheth us with *another* motive to abstain from evil, and to be doing good, because our Maker has His eyes continually upon us; *for good*, if we do well; *for evil*, if we do otherwise. And happy would it be for us, if we would be careful to live and act as having God the constant witness of our conduct.

We should then reason thus with ourselves: I will not do this evil, though none but God sees me; my sin will surely find me out, if I do it; I will faithfully discharge this duty, as in the sight of God, because from Him I expect my reward; I will not speak irreverently of God, Who hears every word I say; nor will I harbour any evil in my mind, because God knows the very thoughts of my heart. I would not dare do this in the presence of a man like myself, and shall I not fear to do it in the presence of that God, Who can confound and destroy me the moment I sin against Him?

A man may be so weak as to think that he has power, and friends, and wisdom, to carry on any design he has in his thoughts, without calling in God to his assistance; he does

[Prov. 21. 30.] not consider what God Himself has declared, "That there is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord." If he did consider this, he would ask His *leave*, His *help*, His *blessing*.

Another may fancy himself too big to be punished, or to be brought to own his crimes. A man *could* not, he *would* not, think so, if he would but consider, that the fear of the Almighty God brought two of the greatest princes on earth to humble themselves for their faults.

The great King Nebuchadnezzar, when God, Who had punished him for his pride, had restored him to his kingdom, makes his confession in these words: "I praise, and extol, and honour, the King of heaven, all Whose works are truth, and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase." And King David was so far from exalting himself against God, when he had sinned against Him, that he thus expresseth his sorrow: "Mine iniquities are gone over my head, and are as an heavy burden, too heavy for me to bear: I will confess my wickedness, I will be sorry for my sin." [Dan. 4. 37.] [Ps. 38. 4, 18.]

Had King Adonibezek considered this truth, *That God is just* as well as *almighty*, he would hardly have forced God to have brought him to this confession for his barbarous inhumanity, "as I have done, so God hath requited me." But then, why should not every christian, who professes to believe *this*, *abhor*, and *fear* the consequence of every act of *injustice*, of *oppression*, of *wrong* to his neighbour? Why should not every christian when he is tempted, through *covetousness*, through *malice*, through *revenge*, to injure any man, why should he not say this to himself?—If I shall give my neighbour this loss, this trouble, this vexation, the righteous God *will certainly requite me;* either I or my children shall pay for it. [Judges 1.7.]

The terrible punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, with fire and brimstone from heaven, is a most remarkable standing proof of God's holiness and purity, of His almighty power, and purpose, to punish all the sins of uncleanness after the most dreadful manner.

All christians, that know and believe this, will *strive*, and *pray*, and *avoid* all temptations to every degree of these sins. They will remember, that it is the same holy God, Who has declared, that no fornicator, nor adulterer, nor unclean person, has any inheritance in the kingdom of God, but are to have their portion with devils. [Eph. 5. 5.]

And let no christian, who believes *the almighty power of God*, say, that he cannot overcome the corruption of his nature, or the temptations he meets with. If the grace of God will enable a man to overcome all the difficulties he *can* meet with, and if grace may be had for asking, *which are two*

SERM. XXXIV.

undoubted truths; why then, whoever, in the sincerity of his heart, prays for grace and strength to overcome the weakness and corruption of his nature, shall certainly have an almighty power to assist him; and then he will have no reason to fear, no reason to complain.

The poor man, *who has faith in God,* will be contented with his condition, though it be never so mean; for he will argue *thus* with himself: I am the creature of the Almighty God; it is not for want of power that He has given me so little of this world's goods; I call Him my Father, and He permits me to call Him so; it must be therefore that He knows that this very condition is the best for me, and therefore I will endeavour to be satisfied.

And the rich man, whose heart is not hardened, and who believes what he saith of God, will *thus reason:* The same Almighty God, Who gave me these riches, is as able to take them away, and very probably will do so, or continue them as a curse to me, if I make them my idol, my God; if I adore them in my heart; if I put my trust, and place my happiness in them; or if I strive to increase them by unjust ways; or if I do not do good with them.

If a christian is in the greatest distress, and does but call to mind what he believes of God: that He is *Almighty;* that He is a *Father;* that He sees all our distress; that He is faithful to His promises;—though he cannot perhaps say, as holy Job did, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" yet he will not utterly despair of a change for the better, because his hope is in God.

[Job 13. 15.]

When a christian considers how plentifully God Almighty has provided for all His creatures; what care He takes of them, in so much as that the least of them does not suffer without His knowledge, without His leave; how justly shall we not reproach ourselves in the words of Christ, "Shall He not be concerned for us? O we of little faith!"

[Matt. 6. 30.]

Can my weakness be greater than the Almighty can help? Can my sins be greater than infinite goodness can pardon? Can my enemies be more and stronger than He can subdue? Are my wants greater than the Almighty can supply? Need I go to the devil for want of help, when the Almighty God is ready to help me? Need I take unjust ways to provide for

myself, or my children, when God has promised to be a Father to them and to me, while we behave ourselves like children of so holy a Father.

If I am at any time going to do a thing which I have reason to fear will displease God, let this thought restrain me; is it not the Almighty God that I am going to offend? Shall I provoke the Lord to anger? Am I stronger than He? When I observe the great patience of God, in sparing us when we deserve punishment, I shall not be so foolish as to imagine that it is for want of power, for He is Almighty; but because He is infinite goodness, He waiteth to be gracious, until His despised mercy and justice shall oblige Him to take vengeance, and then I shall feel His power, when it is too late to avert it by repentance.

Christians too seldom consider how many sins they would certainly have fallen into, had not God interposed His almighty grace. We have, every soul of us, the seed of every wickedness within us; and it is God Who hinders them from springing up, and from becoming our ruin.

It is God, the Almighty God, Who only can oppose the number, the power, the malice, and the snares of evil spirits, which are always attempting to ruin us; and would certainly do so, did not we dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, under the protection of one who is able to save. In confidence of whose protection a christian may be easy amidst all the disturbances the world is subject to, and may say with David, My help is not from man, but cometh from the Lord, [Ps. 121. 2.] Who made heaven and earth.

But then, lest the mighty privilege we christians enjoy, of having the honour to call the Almighty God our Father, should make us proud of ourselves, and in comparison of those who know not God; let His almighty power repress our insolence: for what am I in comparison of the Almighty? What have I, that I have not received from Him? And what have I not to fear, lest He should deprive me of His grace?

By the righteous judgment of God, the heathens were deprived of that light which they abused: "They knew God, [Rom. 1. 21, 28; Eph. 4. 19.] but they glorified Him not as God," saith St. Paul; and what was the consequence? why, "God gave them up to a repro-

SERM. XXXIV.

bate mind, to commit all iniquity with greediness." Christians should always fear every one for himself, lest this should come to be his own case.

And indeed it is but too plain, that the generality of christians forget that they have a rule of faith to direct them, *what to believe of God,* and of *His infinite perfections;* and they will find to their cost, that it will be no advantage to them, to have been distinguished from infidels by a rule of faith which they never minded, and which had no influence upon their lives.

Let me therefore, before I conclude this part of the Creed, put you in mind of a few truths and inferences, which I wish we may all remember, and carry home with us.

When we acknowledge God to be Almighty, let us consider what a dreadful thing it must needs be, to have the Almighty God for our enemy; one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. And then, how happy will all those be, who have an all-powerful God their friend, to direct, to support, and to reward them! A man must have no value for his soul, whom this belief does not influence.

Let us consider further, what a dishonour we do to God, to call Him our Father, and to behave ourselves like the children of Satan. Infidels will conclude from hence,—If these be the children of God, and hope for salvation from believing in Him, who need despair of going to heaven? Let us rather remember, that our Almighty Father has given His children rules to live by; that they are not to follow their *own* will, but *His,* and that their happiness depends upon doing so.

When we call God our Father, let us consider, that our inheritance is in heaven. This should make us less fond of an earthly inheritance; at *least,* we should not think of setting up our rest here.

If God is my Father, I have nothing to fear, while I strive to please Him. I will trust in Him, and I will go to Him with the confidence of a child.

If every christian has a right to call God his Father, then every christian is our brother, and has a right to our *love,* and to our *help,* in his way to heaven.

We profess to believe, that God is the Creator of all things.

Every one who seriously believes this will not dare to abuse any of God's creatures, nor wantonly destroy any thing that God has made. Made indeed they were for the use of man; but whoever destroys creatures that are neither *hurtful* when they are *living*, nor *useful* when *dead*, certainly sins against *his* and *their* Maker.

Let us rather glorify God *in* and *for* His creatures. The very religion of heaven consists in this: "Thou art worthy," [Rev. 4.11.] say the glorified Saints in the Revelations, "Thou art worthy to receive honour, and power, and glory, for Thou hast created all things." And we shall do this in the most humble manner, when we consider, that of all the creatures which God made, man alone behaved himself so ill, as to provoke God to say, "That it repented Him that He had made him." [Gen. 6.6.] My God! And shall not sinful man be afraid, and bitterly repent, that ever he offended and provoked so great a God!

We should indeed have repented of, and bewailed our lost condition to all eternity, had not Almighty God, to manifest His infinite goodness, accepted of the mediation of His beloved Son, by Whom we have been restored to the favour of God.

But this must be the subject of another discourse.

In the mean time, let every one of us examine himself *upon this part of his Creed;* and see what fruits of this faith he has to shew. To live by faith, is to live as if we did indeed believe the things which we profess to believe.

Well then, let me ask myself, Do these truths which I profess to believe, do they really affect my heart? Do I truly fear the Almighty God; that is, do I fear to offend Him? Am I not more afraid of temporal evils than of the wrath of God? Do I really love God; that is, Do I desire and strive to please Him? Do I look upon Him as the fountain of all good; that is, Do I pray to Him for what I want, and give Him thanks for the blessings I receive? Do I shew that I believe His infinite wisdom, by my leaving the choice of all the blessings I hope and pray for to Him? Do I own His fatherly love and authority over me; that is, Do I submit to all His dealings with me without murmuring? Do I own that God sees all that I do; that is, Do I live as in His presence, not daring to do any thing that I believe will displease Him? Do I shew that I am convinced of His infinite

SERM. XXXIV.

patience, and long-suffering, by laying hold of the present opportunity of returning to my duty?

We lament the blindness of the heathen world which know not God. Do we truly value that *light*, and that *Word*, by which we are come to the knowledge of God, and of His glorious perfections? Do we hear the Word of God with attention; and do we beg of God the grace to understand it, and to incline our hearts to observe the lessons we there learn? Why has God thus made Himself known to us, but that we may fear, and love, and adore, and praise Him, and pray to Him, and put our whole trust in Him?

And I pray, consider, christians, what a mighty blessing it is, that we are not left to ourselves, and by our own reason, to find out God; but God has been so good as to manifest Himself unto us in His holy Word; and to discover His *almighty power*, His *wisdom*, His *goodness*, His *justice*, His *faithfulness*, and His *holiness*, in His government of the world.

Consider how very thankful we should all be for the benefit of these Holy Scriptures, in which every soul may come to the true knowledge of God, and the way of salvation. Where *unbelievers* may be convinced of the providence of God throughout all ages, by the fulfilling of innumerable prophecies. Where *sinners* will find reasons to awaken them, by seeing the power of the Almighty manifested in the punishment of the impenitent. Where the righteous may learn to depend entirely upon the protection of God, by seeing His infinite goodness towards such in all ages. Where all may learn to believe, and fear, and love, and worship the Lord Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

We enjoy the benefit of all the creatures, without so much as thinking of Him that made them. Which of them could we want, without being miserable? The sun gives us light and heat; the air, breath and life; the earth and seas, food; the rest of the creatures are all designed for our use and benefit.

Shall we not then glorify God in His works, take notice of His providences, admire His infinite wisdom, be thankful for all His mercies, and dread to provoke a power that can ruin us?

Shall we not desire and endeavour to please a most gracious God, Who has promised eternal happiness to His faithful servants?

Shall we not imitate His *holiness*, depend upon His promises, take care not to abuse His patience and long-suffering?

Shall we not beg of God to increase our faith; to manifest Himself and His glorious perfections every day more clearly to us, that as we grow in years we may grow in grace?

And shall we not abhor and avoid the company and the conversation of all such profane people as may weaken our faith, whether by their wicked examples or loose principles?

Let us look upon all such as the devil's instruments, doing his work, and promoting his interests and his kingdom. All who profane the name of God, who make a mock of sin, who mind not His Word, who regard not His worship, who observe not His day, who despise His ministers and His ordinances: these are people of no faith, no religion; have nothing to restrain them from the greatest wickedness, but the fear of man, or their own carnal interests.

And believe it, christians, for an undoubted truth, that such as have no true faith in God, who do not shew it by their lives, have no true *religion*, no *honour*, no *justice*, no *truth*, no *humanity*, no *sincerity*, to be depended upon.

As for ourselves, for all such as profess to know God, to believe His Word, and to hope for His mercy; let us lay this down for a most certain truth, that he who does not shew his *faith* by his works, has no proof of his sincerity, or of his acceptance with God.

My God! if this be so, how few are there who truly believe the Creed they profess?

Vouchsafe, O God, by Thy almighty grace, to awaken all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness; who have a form of *faith* and of *godliness*, but deny the power thereof. Preserve all christians from such fatal blindness; and deliver all such as are under the power of it.

May these saving truths which we believe be received in all the world, that Thy glorious name may be adored by the heathens!

SERM. XXXIV.

O God, the Creator of all, have mercy upon all whom Thou hast made, for the Lord Jesus' sake, the redeemer of all. To Whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXV.

THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O Jesu benigne! cœlesti tuo verbo et spiritu illumina me, ut veram fidei indolem et naturam in corde meo persentiscam, et ex viva experientia gregem meum pascam. Miserere gentium quæ sedent in tenebris, misere eorum qui fidem ore jactant, operibusque divinis destituti misere seipsos decipiunt. Amen.

JOHN xvii. 3.

This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.

See Luke 13. 26; John 1. 12; 8. 24; 14. 1; 17. 2; Acts 15. 9; 1Cor. 16. 22; 2 Cor. 5. 7; 2 Pet. 2. 9; 1 John 5. 4, 5; Jude ver. 4.

LIFE eternal is what we all hope for, what we all promise ourselves. Would to God, we could all be persuaded seriously to think how we may attain it; that we could be persuaded to believe, that none are ever like to attain eternal life and happiness, but such as make it their great concern to know and to love God; and that none *can* know and love God as they should do, but such as study to know Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us: the eternal lot and portion of every man living being in the hands of Jesus Christ: He Himself assuring us of it; and "that God has given Him power over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to as many as God shall give Him." [John 17. 2.]

It behoves us, therefore, as much as our souls are worth, not only to know the only true God the Father Almighty, but also Jesus Christ, Whom He hath sent to seek and to save us.

And this is that part of our Creed, which I shall at this

SERM. XXXV.

time endeavour to explain to you; and after such a manner, that you may see the necessity, not only of confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus, but of leading a life answerable to such a profession, as you hope for eternal happiness.

I have, in a former discourse, endeavoured to shew how the knowledge and belief of God the Father Almighty ought to affect us; how His infinite power, His wisdom, His holiness, His justice, His faithfulness, ought to influence our practice. But then, we are to consider, that to know God, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, would only fill our souls with fearful apprehensions of what may become of us when we die.

For to know that God is infinitely holy, and infinitely just, as well as powerful; and at the same time to know that my nature is extremely corrupt, and prone to sin continually; that as such, so holy and just a God can take no pleasure in me; and that of myself I know neither how to please, nor how to appease Him, when offended; this must needs fill my soul with fear for myself. And this is the case, this the condition of *every* man, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ: the case, not only of jews, turks, and infidels, but of all christians, who know not that they want a Redeemer, who are not sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer, and of God's infinite goodness in sending His own Son, to shew us the way to eternal life, to teach us by His precepts and by His example, and to make atonement for our sins.

Now, it being impossible to make any christian sensible of these things until he is first made sensible of his deplorable condition by nature, I will first set before you, in as short and plain a manner as I can, the *true*, that is, the very miserable condition of man, of every man living, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It is common, and it is easy, to say, *we are all sinners*, and to say this without being much concerned, without feeling our misery, without fearing the consequence, and even without any thoughts of amendment. And indeed there is nothing which more plainly shews the corruption of our nature, and the danger we are in, than this does,—to own that we are sinners, and not to fear what must follow.

For to be a sinner is to be at enmity with our Creator; with a most *holy* God, Who cannot but hate sin; with a most

just God, Whose righteous laws we have broken; and with an almighty God, Who can destroy us, both body and soul; Who cannot but be highly displeased to see His own creatures, who know His will and His power, yet going on to provoke Him.

It is not material now to enquire, how we came to be such corrupt creatures. It should be enough, one would think, to awaken us, to know that we are such.

To know, for instance, that of ourselves we are prone to evil continually; that the laws of our Creator are grievous to us; that we find a pleasure in doing the very things which He has forbidden us: to know, moreover, that every soul of us have, within ourselves, the seed of every wickedness that ever any other man was guilty of; and a seed which will certainly spring up, and bring forth fruit, upon a suitable temptation, if not prevented by the power of God; we being all of one *race* and *make* with those, who, we are convinced, are going headlong to destruction.

The consequence of all which is, that men need not take pains to go to hell; they will go thither of course, if they make not resistance; and resistance they *will not* make without the grace of God.

All this is too plain to be denied; and daily experience should convince us, that there are no remedies within ourselves for these evils, and the fears they cause in us; since neither the anger of God Who made us, nor the fear of everlasting misery, have, too often, had any power to restrain men when they are eagerly bent either upon their pleasures, or worldly interests.

This, we say again, is the condition of every man living without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And every man, whose eyes God has opened to see *this* to be his sad condition, can have no peace in his soul, till he can have some hopes of a way to escape the wrath of Almighty God, which he has so much reason to fear. It is *then*, and not *till then*, that he will see the blessing of a Redeemer; that is, of some one who can make his peace with God; who can obtain his pardon for what is past; and enable him to live in the favour of God for the time to come.

And this none but Jesus Christ could do; and Jesus Christ

SERM. XXXV.

has done this for us. He has prevailed with God, His Father, to be reconciled to us; He has obtained for us, that our repentance when sincere shall be accepted; that none of our past offences shall be remembered against us; that we shall have all the help we shall stand in need of, to carry us through the difficulties we shall meet with; and that, when we die, our poor endeavours, however imperfect, *if sincere,* shall be rewarded with eternal life and happiness.

And now, christians, you are (one would hope) better prepared to understand this part of your Creed concerning Jesus Christ; and the amazing mercy of God, in seeking the welfare of His rebellious creatures; and in sending His own Son, to take our nature upon Him, by being born of the Virgin Mary.

You will be better able to perceive the reason of all that Jesus Christ *did* and *suffered* while He was upon earth; and that it was purely for us, and for our salvation, that He came down from heaven. It was to declare God's readiness to forgive the greatest sinners upon their repentance, and return to their duty. It was to put us in the way of happiness; to give us such *rules,* and to direct us to such *means,* as are necessary and sufficient to lead us through all the difficulties we shall meet with; and to let us know, what things they are, which will certainly shut us out of heaven.

Particularly, He assured us, that it is no great matter what our lot is in this world, provided we can secure the favour of God; for that this short life is only a state of trial, and a passage to a life that is to last for ever.

To convince us more effectually of this, He made choice of a life of poverty Himself, and was very easy and content with any thing that the providence of God afforded Him.

And to convince mankind that it is no indifferent matter whether they close with this mercy of God or not, He made known this important truth, which before they knew little of; that after this life is ended, we shall, every soul of us, be adjudged to an everlasting state of happiness or misery, according as we shall have behaved ourselves in this world.

And to assure us of the truth of all this, after He had wrought infinite miracles to shew that He came from God, He sealed the truth of these things with His own blood;

for He laid down His life for us, and suffered the punishment of death which *we* had deserved; the punishment and sentence which God had passed upon Adam and all his posterity for *his* sin and disobedience.

And God, to give us the utmost assurance that all which He had *told* us was true, and that what He had *suffered* for our sakes was accepted, RAISED HIM THE THIRD DAY FROM THE DEAD, and in the sight of all His disciples, HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.

And to convince the whole world, that HE SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD; that is, that He hath all power in heaven and earth, He sent down the Holy Ghost to enable His disciples to do the same wonderful things that He had done amongst them; which Holy Spirit will continue to *guide*, and *protect*, and *assist*, His faithful servants, until His COMING AGAIN TO JUDGE BOTH THE QUICK AND THE DEAD.

These are the things which we believe concerning our Lord Jesus Christ; and our salvation depends upon believing them. Our Lord Himself saith expressly, "He that believeth not," Mark 16.16. that is, when these truths are preached to him, "he that believeth not shall be damned."

But then, let us not deceive ourselves in this. It is not enough barely to *believe* these things, unless our lives be answerable to our faith: "Not every one (saith our Saviour) Matt. 7. 21. "that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord," that calls himself a christian, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

And this, good christians, is what I chiefly aim at in the discourse I am now upon; to shew you, *how this part of our Creed may be put into practice;* what powerful motives it furnisheth us with, to make us *holy*, that we may be *happy* eternally.

We believe that our Redeemer was the Son of God. We are commanded to honour the Son even as we honour the Father. John 5. 23. And we have the highest reason to do so; for if the Son of God had not undertaken our redemption, it might have been truly said of us, as it was of Judas, "It had been better for us that we had never been born." [Matt. 26. 24.]

"Surely," (saith God in the parable,) "they will reverence My Son." And dearly *they* paid for it, that did not. God [Matt. 21. 37.]

SERM. XXXV.

grant that we, being warned by the terrible destruction which the Jews met with for rejecting the Son of God, may reverence Him in all His offices of *Prophet, Priest,* and *King,* and in every thing that belongs to Him; that we may reverence His *Word, as the Word of our salvation;* that we may reverence His authority in His *ministers,* as they are the ministers of reconciliation betwixt God and man; that we may reverence His *laws,* His *example,* His *ordinances,* which are the means of our salvation.

Heb. 1. 6. All the angels of God are commanded to worship Him. And shall we poor mortals neglect to do it? *We,* for whom He has done so much! *We,* for whose sins He was for a [Heb. 2. 9.] time set below the angels, "that He might taste death for us;" shall not *we* worship Him in our lives, as well as by our profession? Should not this fill our souls with unspeakable gratitude?

How much reason therefore had St. Paul to give this direc- [1 Cor. 16. 23.] tion to the Church of Corinth: "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha;" that is, let him be excommunicated. Terrible sentence! To be deprived of the mercy of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ. And yet, how many christians are there, besides such as are excommunicated, who wilfully lay themselves under this sentence, by their not loving the Lord Jesus, by not shewing it in their lives! For in vain we flatter ourselves that we believe in Jesus Christ, *if we do not the things which He commands us.*

And because our obedience will always be answerable to our love of God, therefore has God, by giving us His own Son, given us the *greatest reason* to love Him, that we might have the greatest reason in the world to obey Him.

John 13. 13. "Ye call Me Master and Lord," saith our Saviour, "ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am."—Pray, good christians, let us consider what this means.

If we, from our hearts, acknowledge Jesus Christ to be our *Master,* that is, our *Teacher,* why then, we shall never doubt the truth of any thing which He has taught us, though never so strange to our reason and understandings; but we shall receive it as coming from the Son of God, Who neither *can* be mistaken Himself, nor *can* He misinstruct us.

If we acknowledge Him to be our *Lord,* then are we not

our own masters, but we are bound to obey Him in all things which He has commanded.

And let us never forget a truth which He has told us, "that no man can serve two masters;" and that *He* is *our Lord* whom we love most. And therefore, "whoever lives in sin, is the servant of sin," the servant of Satan, let him pretend what he will. [Matt. 6. 24.] [John 8. 34.]

To proceed: The greatest on earth do confess, that Jesus is their Lord and King; that they are His servants; that therefore all their greatness, all their power, cannot secure them against His anger, if they take part with His enemies. And the poorest christian has the *same Lord,* the same Son of God, for his pattern and protector; and therefore is not to be dejected himself; not to be despised and trampled on by others.

Let us all therefore estimate the greatness of our high calling, by the greatness and the majesty *of the Lord* whom we serve.

Our Lord is the only Son of God; we need not fear the powers of hell, nor all the evils that human nature is subject to. He is almighty. He can *help, support,* and *deliver* us. How *wicked* then,—nay, rather, how *foolish*—are they, *who will not have this Man to reign over them?* For this is the language of an infinite number of people. Luke 19. 14.

This is the language of all such as choose to be slaves to sin, and to Satan, rather than serve the Son of God; and especially of all such as would rob our Lord of His divinity, and all faithful christians of the inestimable comfort of having the eternal Son of God for their advocate with the Father.

These are they on whom this sentence is already passed: "Those Mine enemies which would not I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before Me." Luke 19. 27.

This sentence has already been executed upon the nation of the Jews in a most astonishing manner. Christians must expect even a severer judgment, if they deny or despise the Lord that bought them.

When we consider and profess that Jesus Christ took our nature upon Him, by being *born of the Virgin Mary,* we truly conclude, that great was the love of God for His poor creatures, since He sent His own Son from heaven to seek and to save us.

SERM. XXXV.

But then we should further consider, what a sad condition we were in, when this was the only way which Infinite Wisdom could choose; that His own Son should leave the glories of heaven, and should undergo all the miseries of life, to save His sinful creatures from death eternal.

And these are the reasons why the Church of God makes use of the song of the blessed Virgin in her daily service; to put us in continual mind of the blessings and uses of Christ's incarnation. For every christian, in an humble sense of his own unworthiness, and of God's love, may truly say as she did: "My soul doth magnify the Lord; for He hath regarded," He hath greatly honoured, "the low estate" not only of the Holy Virgin, but of all mankind, by taking our nature upon Him, and uniting it to His divine nature, "according to His promises which He made to Abraham, and his seed for ever."

[Luke 1. 46-55.]

By all which we are perpetually put in mind of God's faithfulness to His promises; of His passing over those that think highly of themselves; and of His accepting such as are humble, and sensible of their own unworthiness.

But the highest instance of the love of God for us miserable sinners is, *that Jesus Christ was crucified for us, that He died and was buried.* That He suffered for *our* sakes, and in *our* stead, and what *our* sins had deserved that we should suffer. If this does not affect our hearts, and our practice, it is a sure sign our salvation is not much regarded by us.

As we love our souls, therefore, let us consider, that the sufferings of Christ discover plainly to us the very dreadful nature of sin; and that God cannot but hate it, since His justice required such an atonement. That therefore christians ought to hate it, and every degree of it, as they hope for any benefit from Christ's sufferings.

Jesus Christ laid down His life, that He might obtain of God this favour for us, *that our repentance might be accepted, instead of a perfect obedience.* If therefore we do not repent, and forsake our sins, we are in the same sad condition as if Jesus Christ had never died for us.

The design of Christ's death was to redeem us; as how? Why, "by redeeming us from sin, and purifying to Himself a peculiar people:" a generation of men freed from the pollutions of the world, and "zealous of good works."

Titus 2. 14.

If, through our own fault and negligence, the merits of Christ's death have not this effect upon us, we are still under the power of Satan, under the bondage of sin, and utterly incapable of eternal life and happiness.

In the next place, let us consider that the sacrifice which was offered for us was *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.* This ought to be such an assurance that God is reconciled to us, as a voice from heaven to every particular soul cannot give a greater satisfaction. [John 1. 29.]

Let us, therefore, whenever the memorial of Christ's death and mercies are celebrated in the *Lord's Supper;* let us be careful to apply them every one to himself, saying in our hearts, This body was given for *me,* this blood was shed for *me;* the priest, the minister of God, assures me of it, and I do faithfully believe it.

It was for this reason Jesus Christ *ordained* this holy sacrament, that we might be often obliged to remember His *love,* His *bitter sufferings,* the occasion of His death, the misery we have escaped, the pardon He has obtained, and the graces and the happiness He has purchased for us; that calling these things to mind, we might be obliged, by all the motives of interest and gratitude, to love Him with all our hearts, and to put our whole trust in Him.

Then will our own death, whenever it shall happen, be a blessing to us, when nothing in this world besides can help or comfort us, but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, and what He has done and suffered for us.

We shall then see the importance of our faith, and set an infinite value upon the sufferings of Christ, when we can say with the Apostle, "I know in Whom I have believed;" even in the only Son of God, Who came to seek and to save lost sinners; Who gave His life for us; Who has prevailed with His Father to accept our repentance, Whose grace I have experienced in my life; Whom I have all my life long entreated to plead with God for my pardon; Whose gracious assistance I have begged and prayed for against the attempts and the accusations of the devil, and the fears of my own conscience; and in hopes, that when He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead, that He, Who in our nature had experienced our frailty, and the temptations we are sub- [2 Tim. 1. 12.]

SERM. XXXV.

ject to, that He will accept of my sincere, though imperfect obedience.

We should easily understand how great an advantage it would be to have the son of a king our friend with his father. It does not appear that the generality of christians are sensible of what it is to have Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for a Mediator with God His Father.

In *this* faith, and with *these* hopes, I submit to death, as a punishment which, as sinners, we are all justly condemned to; but then I offer it as a sacrifice for sin, which I am confident God will accept of, in union with that of His own Son, for Whose merits I trust He will be propitious to me.

And therefore I make it one of the petitions of my prayers, that when I come to die, I may with humble confidence make use of my Saviour's dying words upon the cross: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit;" or the last words of St. Stephen, in imitation of his Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

[Luke 23. 46; Acts 7. 59.]

My God! grant that I, and all that now hear me, may die in this faith, and with these dispositions. But then, let us all remember, that as we desire our death, like that of our Saviour and His first martyr, should be a sacrifice of faith, of love, and obedience, we must take care to make our lives so too, or we shall be dreadfully disappointed.

And now to return to the remaining articles of this part of our Creed; namely, that Jesus Christ being crucified, HE DESCENDED INTO HELL, AND ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY FROM THE DEAD; that is, His soul underwent the condition of the souls of all men when separated from the body.

The comfort and hope we draw from hence is *this;* that since Jesus Christ underwent the same fate that we *must* do, then we conclude with the Apostle for *certain*, "that if the same Spirit which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead dwell in us, then He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken our mortal bodies."

Rom. 8. 11.

Here is our hope, *this* our confidence; only let us, as ever we expect to die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, let us not "grieve that Holy Spirit," which was given us in baptism, "whereby we were sealed unto the day of redemption;" and which alone can raise us to life eternal.

[Eph. 4. 30.]

He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. What a comfort is here for sinners! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and took our nature upon Him; Who in our nature felt all our infirmities; Who, to satisfy the justice of God, suffered the death which our sins had deserved; this Jesus, this Saviour, is now in heaven, *and ever liveth to make intercession* [Heb. 7.25.] *for us.*

So that the greatest sinner, whose heart God has touched with a sense of his danger, and who is truly concerned for having offended so good and gracious a Father; such a one need not despair, if he sues to God for mercy and pardon for His Son's sake, with full purpose of heart of living as becomes a christian for the time to come.

And receive it, christians, for a most certain truth, that no man ever prayed for *pardon,* for *faith,* for *strength* to overcome his corruptions, for *perseverance;* no man ever prayed for these, or any other grace, in the sincerity of his heart, and for Christ's sake, but he had his petitions granted.

For Jesus Christ has all power with God; that is the meaning of His sitting at the right hand of God; He is our own flesh and blood; He loves us as His brethren; He loved us so well as to die for us; all our enemies are under His power; He has every thing that He can ask of God, and cannot be refused; and has given us this faithful promise, that whatever we shall ask in His name that He will do for us.

But even this is not all we hope for by His going to heaven. In His last dying speech to His disciples He assures His faithful followers that He ascended into heaven in order to prepare a place for them; that they shall share with Him the blessings of heaven to all eternity. [John 14. 2.]

What have we now to do, good christians, but to endeavour to prepare ourselves for that happy state? And not to lose the time in which we have to do it, lest we for ever come short of it.

What should hinder us from doing this? Shall the pleasures I hope for from the world tempt me to neglect the concerns of my soul and eternity? Not sure, when I consider

SERM. XXXV.

that these are but for a very little while; those of heaven for ever.

Shall my own weakness discourage me? Shall the multitude of my enemies, their malice, or their power, make me afraid? Not if I believe that the grace of God is sufficient to enable me to overcome all difficulties; and that Jesus Christ has obtained this grace for all that ask it in His name.

Do my sins make me despair of pardon? That would be unreasonable indeed, when I am assured that I have an Advocate with the Father, even His own beloved Son, pleading for me.

Shall the sense of my own unworthiness make me fear that heaven is too holy a place for such a miserable creature as I am ever to be admitted there? Let this rather encourage me to be as holy as I can, because Jesus Christ, Who is to be my Judge, has promised to allow of a sincere endeavour after holiness.

And then let me remember, that He *Who is gone to prepare a place for us* has declared, "that in His Father's house are many mansions;" and if by His grace I am thought worthy of the very lowest place in heaven, I shall be sufficiently happy, and shall have cause to be eternally thankful.

[John 14. 2.]

And now you see the wisdom of that Church of which you are members, in obliging us so often to lay before God the meritorious passages of His Son's life and death, in order to prevail with Him to deliver us from the evils which we have justly deserved; and which we should always repeat with the greatest devotion.

And if we do so, He cannot deny our requests, when we plead His *incarnation*, His *nativity* and *circumcision*, His *baptism*, *fasting*, and *temptation*, His *agony* and *bloody sweat*, His *cross* and *passion*, His *precious death* and *burial*, His *glorious resurrection* and *ascension*. We cannot think too often of these mysteries; we cannot too often repeat them. If we do it with attention, it will increase our *faith* and *hope* in God; and is the only way of having success at the throne of grace.

The last article of this part of our Creed is expressed in these words; FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE

QUICK AND THE DEAD; upon which depends our eternity; and therefore to be minded with the greatest seriousness. For at the coming of Jesus Christ again, all men shall rise with their own bodies, and shall give an account of their own works; and "they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." [Matt. 25. 41, 46.]

And will not this awaken christians? Shall we profess this truth, and yet be careless, and sleep on, and die in our sins, and rise again only to be miserable? God forbid: rather let the knowledge and the belief of a *future judgment* have its *saving*, its *proper* effects upon us.

For example: my own conscience tells me that I have done many things, which, if not forgiven, will rise up in judgment against me. Well then; what have I to do, but to endeavour to prevent the judgment of God, by judging and condemning myself, by confessing my sins, by imploring His gracious pardon, and by bringing forth fruits answerable to amendment of life?

And every christian who would not have this article of his Creed to be a plague and a torment to him, ought every day of his life to have his accounts in some sort of readiness, that he may live with comfort and die free from despair. And to make our accounts easier, we should do well always to ask leave of God before we undertake any thing of moment. This would secure His blessing, if we are in a good way; and hinder us, if we are in a bad.

If a christian would have but the courage to say to himself: This careless life I lead I must one day answer for; this *injury* I am going to do, this *injustice*, this *oppression*, this *fraud*, this *malicious* story, this *ill use of my time*, this squandering away of my estate; these will certainly rise up in judgment against me: what an infinite mischief would this prevent?

And let us not fancy, because God spares us in this world, that therefore we are safe. No; for this very reason we may be assured, that God being just, there *must* be an after-reckoning; and His Spirit assures us, *that He reserveth sinners unto the day of judgment to be punished.* [2 Pet. 2. 9.]

How thankful then, instead of repining, should christians

SERM. XXXV.

be, when they are called to an account in this life for their offences; when they are intreated, or even when they are compelled, to own their faults; *and judge themselves, that they may not be judged of the Lord.*

[1 Cor. 11. 31.]

And let us all remember, that wicked christians will be judged to the severest doom. They know the will of God; they know the terrors of the Lord; they may have all the assistance to do their duty that their hearts can wish for; they have the promise of heaven to encourage them; they have the ministers and the means of grace and salvation with them. How dreadful then must the judgment of that day be to such people!

On the other hand; such christians as do *believe*, and do endeavour to *live* under a sense of a judgment to come, will have no reason to dread that day; forasmuch as they may, with the greatest assurance, rely upon the mercy and goodness of their Judge. For their Judge Himself knows what *infirmities* they are subject to, and what *enemies* and *temptations* they have to struggle with; He will therefore accept of a *sincere*, though *imperfect* obedience. We may therefore promise ourselves, from His word and from His mercy, all the favour our case can bear; only let us not hope for His mercy while we continue to offend Him wilfully.

In order to this, let us often call to mind, that we have something to *fear*, and something to *hope* for, after death. Let us set before our eyes the two sentences which Jesus Christ Himself has told us shall be passed upon *all* men, as their lives shall require: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you!" "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Matt. 25. 34, 41.

Whoever can hear these sentences without concern, without considering which of them may be his own portion, must be given over to a reprobate mind, so that all further arguments are in vain.

To conclude, therefore, this discourse. You will learn, from what has been said, how much you ought to value that Gospel, which has made known to us the mysteries of our redemption; the love of God; the love of Jesus Christ for His lost creatures; His *incarnation*, His *death*, and the reasons of them both; His *resurrection*, His *ascension*, and His

great power with God; and lastly, His design to reward His servants, and to punish His enemies.

You cannot be so insensible, as to think that these things do not concern every soul of us; and yet how often do we repeat these articles of our faith, without ever thinking of ordering our lives according to what we believe!

We have great need, therefore, to beg of God, to kindle in our hearts a most high degree of love for our Redeemer; Who for our sakes left the glories of heaven, fulfilled the whole law for us, died for us that we might not die eternally, and Who is continually pleading for us at God's right hand.

In one word; we have the Son of God for our *Brother,* for our *Master,* and *Teacher;* for our *example;* for our *sacrifice,* to expiate our sins; for our *Saviour;* for our *King,* and *Protector;* for our *Mediator* with God. What can we desire more? Yes, O Jesus! this one thing we desire besides; that we may have the grace which Thou only canst procure for us; that we may have the grace to consider these things, and to lay them seriously to heart; and that our lives may be answerable to our profession.

Now to God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, and dominion, now and for ever.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

Vouchsafe, O Jesus, to fill my heart with Thy Holy Spirit; that it may appear in all my words and actions, and especially in this work before me, that I am governed by the Holy Ghost; and may He sanctify this discourse to the salvation of all that hear it. Amen.

Acts ii. 32, 33.

See Luke 11. 13; John 14. 25, 26; Rom. 8. 16; 1 Cor. 12. 3; Tit. 3. 5.

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.

I have, in two former discourses, explained to you the two first parts of the articles of our Creed, and shewed you how they are to be put in practice; because, as without faith it is impossible to please God, so without a suitable practice our Christian name, or Christian faith, will be of little use to us.

I am now come to the last part of our Creed, concerning *the Holy Ghost,* and the following articles, which are of the utmost importance to us.

The occasion of the words now read to you was *this:* Jesus Christ, just before His ascension into heaven, had told His disciples, that as a sure proof of His being *the Son of God,* and that whatever He had told them was most certain, and that His death was accepted of God as a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; to give them the utmost assurance of *this,* He promised them, that He would send down the Holy Ghost from heaven, to supply

His place on earth, to abide with them (that is, with them and their successors) for ever; that He should lead them into all truth; bring all things to their remembrance whatever He had taught them; and that He *should convince the world of the sin of rejecting Christ,* and treating Him as an impostor; of the corruption of human nature, and the necessity of a Redeemer; of the righteous judgment of God upon the impenitent. John 16. 8—11.

This He promised His disciples; and accordingly, ten days after His ascension, when the whole nation of the Jews, and proselytes from all the nations of the world, were met at the great feast in Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost descended in a visible form upon the Apostles, and enabled them in a moment to speak to all those different nations, and to preach to them, to every one in their own language.

This, as it needs must, astonished all that heard them. Upon which St. Peter takes occasion to inform them, that what they so much wondered at was pursuant to a promise which Christ had made them; and that this was a sure proof, that Jesus Christ, Whom they supposed to be no more than a man, and as such had put Him to death, *that He was the Son of the Most High God,* as He had often told them; and that God had received Him into heaven, and had given Him all power in heaven and on earth. And to convince them of this, He had sent down the Holy Ghost in that wonderful manner, Who enabled them to do what none but God could do.

He appeals for the truth of the miracle to their own senses; and the argument was so forcible and strong, that *as many as were disposed for eternal life believed,* which were about three thousand, who were converted at that time. [Acts 13. 48.]

And soon after, most of the nations of the then known world were, by their preaching to them in their several languages, brought out of the darkness of idolatry, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ.

And it is upon *this,* that our faith in the Holy Ghost is most firmly founded. We believe in the Holy Ghost, that He is an infinite and an eternal Spirit, *Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified;* that He is

SERM. XXXVI.

the immediate cause of all holiness in us; and that it is He Who must fit us for heaven and happiness, by His grace and assistance. That therefore we are dedicated to Him, together with the Father, and the Son, in baptism; and are directed to make it one of our daily prayers, that He may ever be with us.

We believe particularly, that it was He Who inspired the holy apostles, and enabled them to lay the foundation of ONE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, which is the society of all true believers through the world; for that is the meaning of the word *catholic;* (that is, universal;) because the Church of Christ is not confined to one people, as was the Church of the Jews, but is appointed for the salvation of all nations, and all ages.

We believe, and are assured, that it is the same Holy Ghost Who still appointeth the successors of the apostles,
Acts 20. 28. which are the governors and pastors of Christ's flock. "Take heed (saith St. Paul) unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers."

It is the same Holy Spirit Who enables them to preach the Gospel with effect; Who empowers them to seal covenants betwixt God and men; to sanctify us, by consecrating us to God, making us members of His Church and family, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

It is the Holy Ghost Who empowers and commands His ministers, to *reprove, correct,* and to turn out of that society, all such as are a scandal to it, and refuse to be reformed. For this society is, or ought to be, A COMMUNION OF SAINTS; that is, of persons dedicated to God; who are all members of one body, of which Christ is the head; who have all one common faith, one hope of eternal life; who are to pray for, and to assist, and be concerned for, one another as members of one body. This we firmly believe, and ought to act accordingly, as we hope for a share in the blessings promised to this society. One of which especial blessings we believe to be the FORGIVENESS OF SINS upon our true repentance.

This was what the apostles were, by the Holy Ghost, com-
[2 Cor. 5. 19.] manded to publish, THAT GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF; that He had appointed *them* and *their* successors to be the ministers of this reconciliation; that

He had ordained the Sacrament of Baptism for the remission of sins past; and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as a standing means to restore such as should afterwards fall into sin, and repent of the same, to restore them to God's favour and pardon.

And we shall be more sensible of the importance and comfort of believing the *forgiveness of sins,* when we consider the next article of our Christian faith, which is THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY: for this is revealed to us by the Holy Ghost,—that all men shall rise again with their own bodies, and give an account of their own works. God has expressly said this, and He is able to do it; and therefore it is necessary we should know and firmly believe it: for the consequence of the resurrection will be AN EVERLASTING LIFE; and *they that have done good,* or have lived good lives, *shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil,* or have lived bad lives, and have not repented, *shall go into everlasting fire.*

Thus I have given you a short account and explanation of this last part of your Creed; that as in the two former parts I did endeavour to shew you how we might put our *faith into practice,* so I may take this occasion of doing the same in all these articles of the Christian faith just now mentioned.

And believe it, christians, it is not for nothing that you are so often called upon to repeat these articles of your faith: it is that you may put them in practice, as you hope for salvation; and that you may do so every day of your lives: that, as you BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE, you may, every day of your life, pray for His gracious *assistance,* His *guidance,* and *blessing:* that you may continue true and living members of THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, which is the appointed means of salvation: that believing the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, you may strive to live as becomes members of so holy a society, or body, which has Jesus Christ for its head and pattern, the Holy Ghost for its guide and comforter, and God the Father for its eternal reward: that believing the FORGIVENESS OF SINS, on one hand, you may never *despair* of mercy, nor, on the other, *presume* on God's mercy and forgiveness, while you continue to live in any known sin: that professing to believe THE RESURRECTION

SERM. XXXVI.

OF THE BODY, AND A LIFE EVERLASTING; you may often remember, that you will most certainly come forth out of the grave just as you go in, either *beloved* or *hated* of God to all eternity.

But that we may not pass over these articles, which contain truths of so great importance, too lightly, or as lightly as too often we repeat them, we will now consider, *how they should influence our practice.*

And in the first place let us consider, that we are, every soul of us, subject to be led and governed both by *good* and *evil spirits.* St. Paul expressly tells us, "That there is an evil spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience." And he reckons up a very numerous host of these enemies of mankind.

Eph. 2. 2.

Now, christians, consider what a mercy it is, that from our very infancy we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost, by Whom we are put under the protection of the angels of God, who are appointed *to minister unto such as shall be heirs of salvation.*

[Heb. 1. 14.]

But then let us remember that this Holy Spirit may be *grieved,* and provoked to leave us,—to leave us, not only to ourselves, though that would be curse enough,—but to the malice of the devil, who goes about seeking whom he may be permitted to devour, finding them out of the protection of the Holy Ghost, and the holy angels His substitutes.

And this, God knows, is but too often the case, and the reason that so many, who were once the children of God, are now become the children of the devil; they forgot their baptismal vows; they left off to pray for the fellowship of the Holy Ghost; they added sin to sin, till they provoked God to forsake them; and then they became the slaves of the devil, and *must* do what he will have them to do, though never so unreasonable, never so wicked.

Let us therefore always remember, that the condition upon which the Holy Ghost will continue to guide and to protect us, is *this;* that we keep the vows we made at our baptism, or that we sincerely repent when we are sensible we have broken them.

When a christian, therefore, is going to do any thing which he knows to be a sin, he should argue *thus* with himself: I

shall certainly displease the Holy Spirit by this action; if I shall provoke Him to leave me, I shall become a slave to Satan, and God knows whether ever I shall be able to get out of his snare.

There is no question to be made, but men are often forced to reason after this manner; the only fault is, they do not heartily beg the aids of the Holy Spirit: my soul for that man's, who, when assaulted by temptations, turns his eyes inwards, and begs the assistance of the Holy Ghost, if he does not receive grace to help him in time of need.

This is the great happiness of a christian, *that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in us,* and consecrated by His presence; He is always in His temple, unless forced by our sins to leave it: what has a christian then to do, but to apply to Him at all times, and on all occasions; to be careful neither to *speak,* nor to *think,* nor to *do,* any thing that may displease Him; and, if we chance to do so, immediately to ask pardon? He is always in His temple, and ready to hear us. [1 Cor. 6. 19.]

Let us therefore ever and anon plead with Him, as our necessities shall require. From Thee I beg to receive this grace; it belongs to Thee, my God, to fortify my soul against this temptation; give me light to see, and grace to amend, where I have done amiss; render me every day more worthy of Thy presence, and of Thy consolations.

This is the way to *pray without ceasing.* To secure the *presence,* the *assistance,* the *comforts,* of this Holy Spirit, by which we were sealed unto the day of redemption. [1 Thess. 5. 17.]

Every business, every book we read or hear, every blessing we receive, every turn of Providence, will furnish us with occasions of retiring to the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is within us, either to give Him thanks, or to deprecate His judgments, or to acknowledge His glorious attributes, His power, or His wisdom, or His justice, or His goodness.

To proceed: The meanest christian has this *privilege,* this *honour,* to have the Holy Ghost for his *God,* his *guide,* and *protector;* and the holy angels for his guard: and it is purely for want of faith and consideration that ever any one christian despiseth another, or treats him with contempt.

Christians are not sensible of the greatness of this sin, and

SERM. XXXVI.

that makes it so common. It would not be so common, if we would thus reason with ourselves: this poor man is dear to God, even his poverty makes him the more so; he is a temple of the Holy Ghost; Jesus Christ Himself assures me, "that their angels stand in the presence of God." And St. James expressly says, "that God hath chosen the poor, rich in faith, and heirs of His kingdom."

[Matt. 18. 10.]

chap. 2. 5.

When we consider, that it was by the power of the Holy Ghost that the Christian religion, *the only way of salvation*, is established in the world; that it was He Who inspired the holy writers; that it is for *this reason* that the Bible is called, and is indeed, THE WORD OF GOD; that it is God Who speaks to us in this Word, and by His ministers: when we *know*, and *believe*, and *confess* this, what regard shall we have for this Word; how shall we abhor, and avoid, those that profane it, as well as those that would hinder us from reading it; with what reverence and attention shall we read or hear it; what entire credit shall we give to every thing declared or commanded in it; how carefully should we order our lives according to this Word; how assured may we be, that we shall never fall into any dangerous error, while we consult this book, and those pastors whom the Holy Ghost has appointed to lead and to instruct us; and when we sincerely beg the assistance of that Holy Spirit!

[Heb. 12. 14.]

And in the last place, since "without holiness no man can see the Lord;" and that none but this Holy Spirit can sanctify and make us holy; that it is He alone, Who must change our hearts, and cause that we become as it were NEW CREATURES: this should oblige us to pray continually for His holy fellowship, His guidance and blessing.

[2 Cor. 13. 14.]

It is for this reason, that the Church concludes her daily service with this prayer, that "the fellowship" the communication of the gifts and graces "of the Holy Ghost, may be with us evermore."

A man must be a very great stranger to himself, and to his own corrupt nature, who does not see the reason of this, and the absolute necessity of being changed into a new man, before he can be fit for heaven, or capable of eternal happiness; that he must have a new *heart*, new *desires*, a new *spirit*, and new *powers*, before ever he can *believe*, and *under-*

stand, and *love,* and *do,* what God has commanded as necessary to salvation.

Now, it is this Holy Spirit, given at our baptism, and dwelling in us, from Whom we have this grace. If we know and believe this sincerely, we shall endeavour never to *grieve,* never to oppose this Holy Spirit, but suffer Him to perfect the good work He hath begun in us, in order to make us holy, that we may be eternally happy.

And never let us *say,* never let us *pretend,* never let us *fear,* that we cannot overcome the corruption of our nature. This Holy Spirit is the almighty power of God; He taketh under His care all such as are consecrated to Him in baptism; He is able to *convince* us of the absolute necessity *of caring for our souls;* He is able to direct us how to do it effectually; He can enable us to overcome all the difficulties we can possibly meet with, and at last make us acceptable to God, which is the greatest happiness the soul of man can desire. Only let us not oppose Him, let us not force Him to forsake us and leave us to ourselves; for then we have no remedy to reclaim or to help us; so that we shall as surely perish as we are sinners, and as such utterly unfit for heaven.

The next article of our Creed is, THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH; that is, I believe and profess myself to be a member of that body of men which has Jesus Christ for its head, and His Word and Spirit for their guide; and which, though dispersed over the world, have one *God,* one *Faith,* one *Hope;* a flock, whose pastors are appointed by the Holy Ghost, and who have the faithful promise of Jesus Christ to be with them until His coming again.

I believe likewise that God, from the beginning, has added to *this society* "daily such as should be saved," having committed *the word of reconciliation,* and all the means of grace and salvation, to His ministers, the pastors and governors of this society. Acts 2. 47. [2 Cor. 5. 19.]

Well, then, how ought the *belief* and *profession* of *this* to affect christians? Why, every serious christian will thus reason with himself:

The Church is called *holy,* because the great design of this society is, to make men holy, that they may be happy. For that very end, I was made a member of this Church: most

SERM. XXXVI.

certainly, therefore, if I am not an holy member of this Church on earth, I shall be for ever excluded that in heaven, of which this is a part.

If God *addeth to this Church such as shall be saved,* then if I, for my wicked life, shall deserve to be separated, cut off, or excommunicated, out of any particular Church which is a true member of this holy Catholic Church; then am I, most assuredly, deprived of the ordinary means of grace, and out of the way of salvation.

If the rulers and pastors of this Church are indeed appointed by the Holy Ghost (as St. Paul saith expressly, Acts xx. 28, they are), then, if I shall resist their *authority;* if I shall despise their godly *admonitions;* if I shall kick at their *reproofs;* if I shall make a mock of their persons, and of their doctrine; then do I plainly resist the Holy Ghost (by Whose authority they act), and resist also the counsel and designs of God for my salvation.

If I believe that the priest, the minister of God, is appointed by the Holy Ghost to *teach,* to *intercede,* and to *bless* the people in His name; why then I shall reverently attend to his word, highly value his blessing and his prayers, as some of those ways by which God has ordained to give me His blessing and His grace.

If I *profess* to be a member of this holy Church, then am I bound to make a profession of being such, to join in all holy offices, with all those who in every place call *on the name of Jesus Christ, both their and our Lord,* provided they have nothing in their worship contrary to faith and piety. And I am not to judge of this too rashly, lest, by separating myself without cause from a sound part of the Catholic Church, I separate myself from Jesus Christ, Who is the head of that Church, out of which there is no salvation; as none were saved from perishing but those who were in the ark with Noah.

[1 Cor. 1. 2.]

And may God grant that we may all truly understand, and value, the glorious privilege of being members of this Church, and *that we may become holy* in its communion, *as He who has called us is holy.*

[1 Pet. 1. 15, 16.]

In the next place, there is to be in this Church a COMMUNION OF SAINTS, that is, of christians; for in the Church of

Christ, saints and christians signify the same thing; all christians *being called to holiness.* [1 Thess. 4. 7.]

A communion (that is, there ought to be a communication, a good understanding, a fellow-feeling) amongst christians, as there is amongst the members of the same body, in which every member contributes towards the ease, welfare, and safety of the whole.

In this communion, christians are obliged to love and to bear with one another; to have compassion one for another; to pray for, and to help one another; not considering ourselves as in a private capacity; but as people united to Christ and His Church, and entrusted, every one, with talents, whether of wisdom, or authority, or power, or riches, for the use of the whole body.

A christian, who considers himself in *this capacity,* will reason thus with himself: I have nothing but what I have from the bounty of God; I cannot pretend to be more a favourite of heaven, than he that wants what I have; why then have I more than is sufficient for my own necessities? The answer is plain, *that I may give to him that needeth;* and if I do not, I am unjust. So that in truth, all the advantage that a rich christian has above a poor christian is *this;* that he has enough to live comfortably himself, and has it in his power to make such as want live comfortably too. [Eph. 4. 28.]

God has given another man *authority,*—not for his own sake, sure! No; but that by doing justice, preserving peace, discountenancing vice and impiety, promoting of virtue, he may make the whole community easy and happy, and be a means of preserving it in the favour of God.

If I have more *learning* and *knowledge* than many others, let me not grow proud however; for I shall certainly answer for it, as for a talent committed to my trust, and dearly pay for it, if I do not endeavour to instruct the ignorant, and guide those that are out of the way.

They that have *time* to spare, and are freed by the circumstances of their condition from bodily labour, are apt to think themselves very happy; and so they would be, if they would spend *that time,* either in works of mercy or charity, for the good of others.

For, in truth, every christian owes something to the com-

SERM. XXXVI.

munion of which he is a member: the rich owe to the poor a part of their substance; the poor owe to them their prayers; the ignorant stand obliged to those that instruct them; and these again stand obliged to somebody for their leisure to get wisdom.

[1 Cor. 12. 26.]

And the Apostle's conclusion will ever be found true, though little minded, "that if one member suffer, all the members" (though not always perceived) "will suffer with it." And he who is not concerned for the good or evil which happens to others, is no better than a dead member of the body of Christ, and knows nothing of that communion which ought to be amongst christians.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS is the next article of our Christian faith; and it is an article of the greatest comfort; for all having sinned, and all being subject to sin, and on that account liable to the displeasure of God, what a mercy is it that we have a remedy at hand, by which we may be sure of pardon upon most reasonable terms. And this we have Jesus

[Luke 24. 47.]

Christ's own word for; commanding, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached unto all nations in His name;" that is, *repentance* on man's part, and *forgiveness of sins* on the part of God. IN HIS NAME; that is, this favour is granted for His sake, and for the sake of what He has done and suffered for us; always remembering, that He died for us, not to save us without repentance on our part, but to prevail with God to accept of our repentance.

A christian therefore, when he reflects upon this article of

[Rom. 2. 4.]

his Creed, should argue thus with himself: This great *goodness of God ought,* in all reason, *to lead me to repentance.* If repentance *must* go before pardon, why do I delay it one moment? If repentance is the gift of God, why do I not ask it? What if I should provoke God by this contempt of His mercy, to leave me to myself? I will therefore beg of God to give me that repentance to which He has promised mercy and pardon; I will not be afraid to see the charge that is against me, because I have the word of my Saviour for it,

[Mark 3. 28.]

"that all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men;" except that one against the Holy Ghost, which no man has committed who sues to God for pardon, which he could not do, but by the assistance of that Holy Spirit.

And if my sins are such as give me great disturbance of mind, I will not only confess them to God, but I will apply to some one of those pastors whom God has appointed to be the ministers of reconciliation betwixt God and man: to him I will open my case and my grief; I will take his ghostly counsel and directions; and, when *he* judges my repentance to be sincere, according to the rules of the Gospel, I will beg of *him* to give me absolution; for sure, sure those words of Jesus Christ were not so often repeated to no purpose, "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." I will therefore faithfully believe, that it will be unto me according to this word. [John 20. 22]

And because I must not expect forgiveness of God, without a forgiving temper in myself, it shall be my constant prayer and endeavour to comply with a condition so very reasonable; and yet too hard for flesh and blood, without the grace of God.

And lastly, I will not forget the words of my Saviour, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee;" lest by sinning and repenting, and repenting and sinning so often, I provoke God at last to deny me the grace of repentance; I will rather consider my *weakness* and *backslidings*, and be more importunate for grace for the time to come. [John 5. 14.]

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY is the next article of our Creed. "The hour is coming, (saith our Lord,) in the which all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5. 28, 29.

Oh, christians! what an amazing truth is this, to such as are not careful to keep their bodies in *temperance, soberness*, and *chastity!* What a prodigious difference will this hour make betwixt good and bad livers!

Will any man, in his right mind, persuade himself, that this body which he now defiles with whoredom, or debauches with continual drunkenness, or pampers with luxury, that such a body shall rise again to be happy? O, no: such a person can have no hopes—(miserable hopes, indeed!)—no hopes, but that God, and His Word, and their Creed, may not be true.

A christian will rather reason thus with himself:—What

SERM. XXXVI.

will it profit me to enjoy the short pleasures of this life, if the end shall be damnation? I will rather follow the example of an Apostle: "Keep under my body, lest I be a castaway." [1Cor.9.27.] As I hope for God's favour, I will endeavour to glorify Him both in my body and my spirit, which are both His. And whereinsoever I have dishonoured Him by any of my members, I will strive to make some amends. If my *eyes* have transgressed, I will now make a covenant with them; I will bless God with my *tongue;* I will refrain my feet from every evil way; I will open my hand to the poor and needy; and I will not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

This is to live by faith. And he who repeats this Creed, and will not be persuaded to do so, the belief of a resurrection will be a plague and a torment to him as long as he lives.

The concluding article of our Creed is the belief of a LIFE EVERLASTING: a life that is to last for ever, either in endless torments, or in endless happiness, both of body and soul. Let us consider this as we ought to do: for now is the time in which we are to choose *where* and *what* we are to be to all eternity. There is therefore no time to be lost to make this choice: "The night cometh (saith our Lord) when no man can work;" [John 9. 4.] no more can be done by ourselves, or by others for us; it will then be too late to *repent*, to *resolve*, to *promise*, to *wish*, or to *do* any thing.

Let us, therefore, every soul of us, while we have time, have our eyes and our thoughts upon eternity. This will wonderfully influence all our actions.

What signifies it, a christian will say to himself, what my portion is in this world, since I am so soon to leave it, and am going to an everlasting life? All the riches I treasure up here will stand me in no stead when I come to die; I will therefore endeavour to lay up *my treasure in heaven*, where I hope to be for ever. [Matt. 6. 20.] Why should I be apprehensive of the evils of this life, or complain too much under them, when I verily believe and hope for a better and an eternal life; and that these very afflictions are designed by a merciful God to make me more fit for that life? I will often remember, *that the wages of sin is death*, eternal death, if not repented of; [Rom. 6. 23.] I

will therefore make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and make my peace with Him by a true repentance. I am convinced, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord in peace;* [Heb. 12. 14.] I will therefore, from this moment, endeavour to be as holy as, by God's grace, I can be, that I may be happy for ever.

Thus, good christians, I have gone through all the articles of your Creed, or Christian faith. You see the reason why we are required to repeat them so often; it is, that we may live like people who profess to believe such important truths.

Few christians, it is true, deny their Creed; but too many live as if there were nothing in it which they need hope or fear.

What will this indifference end in? These things are true, and will be found so, whether we mind them or not. And if a man perish eternally, what signifies it whether he perishes as a christian or an infidel? Let us therefore not think ourselves one jot the safer, because we are christians, unless our lives be answerable.

As for those who hate, and do not care to repeat the Creed; the reason of this is plain: it puts them in mind of an almighty and just God, Whose laws they have broken, and resolve to break them again; Who sees all their ways; Whose mercy in sending His own Son to save them they have despised; and Who has appointed a day in which He will judge them in righteousness: because the very sight of it upbraids them with the highest ingratitude, in despising the love of God in this dispensation, and all the means of grace and salvation, which He has ordained. Lastly; because it puts them in mind of a life everlasting, which they are not willing to prepare for; and of eternal death and torments, which they have too much reason to fear.

But happy are they who think much of these truths; and who, by doing so, come to be fully persuaded of them, and close with them, and are thankful to God Who has made Himself and these things known to us, and Who has done so much for us, in order to make us eternally happy.

And be assured of it, good christians, that a time is coming, (that is, when we come to die,) that we shall see the importance of a true faith; when we shall set a true value upon Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us; when no

SERM. XXXVI.

carthly thing can help or comfort us, but a firm faith in His merits. But then, let us consider, that we can have no assurance of this, but by living as if we did indeed believe the truths we profess to believe. Let us therefore put these questions, every one to himself, and have a direct answer from our own heart:—

Is my life answerable to my faith? Does my faith purify my heart? Does it produce obedience to the commands of God? Does it make me sensible of my sin and misery? Does it make me seek for in earnest, and value, a Redeemer? Do I find myself governed by the Holy Spirit of God? Do I labour to secure the forgiveness of my sins by a true repentance and amendment, where I have done amiss? Do these amazing truths,—*Everlasting Life* and *Everlasting Misery*,—awaken in me a concern answerable to what I am to gain or lose?

I may then judge, whether my faith is saving, or whether it is only the faith of hypocrites. If the latter, these articles of our Creed will only be so many articles of our condemnation.

From which judgment and condemnation, may God deliver us all, for the Lord Jesus' sake. To Whom be dominion and power, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMAND; OR, THE LOVE OF GOD.

Amantissime Deus, fons omnis gratiæ, accende in me, per Spiritum Tuum, purissimam amoris Tui flammam, ut super omnia Te diligam; largire ut hoc amore impletus, e viva experientia alios doceam, ut et ego ipse, et qui me audiunt, in Tui imaginem magis, magisque transformemur; propter perfectum amorem Redemptoris nostri. Amen.

MARK xii. 32—34.

And the Scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

See Ps. 97. 10; John 14. 21, 23; Eph. 3. 17, 18; 1 John 4. 19; 5. 3.

I MAKE choice of these words, as being the same in effect which our Lord has elsewhere affirmed to be the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets. That is, these are what all God's revelations to mankind are designed to explain and enforce.

But then I rather choose these words, as spoken by a Jew, to shew, that the Jewish and Christian Religions do both aim at the very same thing; and that such as were truly spiritual, in all ages, knew very well, that all outward institutions, from the beginning, were only in order to promote *the love of God*, and of *our neighbour*, amongst men.

SERM. XXXVII.

For this is the meaning of the Scribe's saying, *that to love God with all the heart, and one's neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices;* that is, the love of God, and of our neighbour, is a more indispensable duty than all the sacrifices in the world. Not as if sacrifices could have been neglected, having been appointed from the beginning,

Heb. 9. 22. and without which there was no remission of sins; but we are hence to learn, that the end of all religion is to *create* or to *preserve*, the love of God, and of our neighbour, amongst men.

St. Paul uses a way of speaking very like this, when he

1 Cor. 7. 19. saith, *Circumcision is nothing;* that is, it will not render a man more acceptable to God, unless it obligeth him to love God, and to keep His commandments.

St. Paul would not have us to conclude, from these words, that a Jew under the Law might at his pleasure have neglected to circumcise his children; for this was, by God's appointment, a visible sign, by which His Church and people were distinguished from all others, and by *that sacrament* sanctified to Himself. It was a seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed, that He would be *their* God, and that they should neither have, nor love, any other God besides Him. Circumcision therefore, was nothing; that is, it would not avail any of the seed of Abraham to have been circumcised, unless he bound himself, by that ordinance, to love the Lord with all his heart.

1 Pet. 3. 21. St. Peter saith, in effect, the same of Baptism: "Baptism (saith he) doth now save us," or becomes a means of salvation; "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh," not as it is an outward visible sign, "but (as it supposes) a good conscience enquiring of God," to know and to love Him; or as it obliges all who are baptized to live according to the will of that God to Whom they are dedicated in baptism.

1 Cor. 3. 7. Lastly; St. Paul saith of preaching, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth;" that is, in comparison of *God that giveth the increase.* Not that *preaching* and *hearing* are, under the Gospel, indifferent things, which men may value or despise at their pleasure; the Spirit assuring us to the contrary,—That such as will not hear cannot believe, and consequently *cannot be saved.* But *this* is what

we are to learn from these words of the text, and from such like expressions in holy Scripture; namely, that the end and design of all outward ordinances in religion *are*, and ever *were*, to bring men to the knowledge and love of God, and of their neighbour; and that as, on one hand, outward institutions are not, *at our peril*, to be neglected or despised,—for that would be to despise the means of grace, or the merciful provision which God has ordained to make us happy; neither, on the other hand, are they to be depended on as sufficient to salvation, unless they lead us to the love of God, and of our neighbour.

"Thou art not far" (saith Jesus Christ) "from the kingdom of heaven;" that is, thou hast a right apprehension of the meaning and design of all religious duties, and you are in a fair way of becoming a christian; for you confess that the love of God, and of your neighbour, is the end of all religion; and the Christian religion, of all others, will soonest lead you to the love of God, and of your neighbour. *You are not therefore far from the kingdom of heaven.* For when you come to be a christian, you will have the same opinion of the outward duties of Christianity, as you *now* have of the *Jewish sacrifices;* you will not depend upon them any farther than as they are means of obtaining a divine nature, of uniting the soul to God; or as they are expressions of that love which men owe to God, and to their neighbour.

You will say, for instance, that to love God with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul and strength, and to love his neighbour as himself (that is, to deal with him with justice and charity), is more than *alms*, than *fasting*, than *prayers*, or than any *outward duties of Christianity*. Not that you will dare to omit or slight *these;* since they are appointed by God for attaining that love, which, *of all things*, is most acceptable to Him. But then you will not *rest* in *these*, as if they were any farther well-pleasing to God, than as they are the most proper methods of restoring us to the image of God, in which we were at first created; that is, in leading us the very shortest way to the *love of God*, and *of our neighbour*, which, as was said before, is the very end and design of the Christian religion, as you acknowledge it was of the Jewish; for you say with

SERM. XXXVII.

truth and *discretion*, "that to love the Lord God with all the heart and soul, and one's neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices."

And this is the reason why these are by our Lord called *the Two Great Commands:* namely; because all the rest of God's commands were given in order to create and preserve the love of God, and of our neighbour.

The *First Command* (for instance) forbids us to place our happiness, our dependance, any where but on God; for if we once believe that any thing can make us more happy than He that made us, we cannot but love that thing better than God.

For this reason the Scriptures call a covetous man *an idolater*; because such a man looks upon riches as sufficient to procure him the greatest comfort; he desires them, he depends upon them, he loves them, above all things.

The holy Scriptures say the same of the *glutton*, that he makes *his belly his god;* that is, he thinks of it, he loves it with all his heart.

That our minds, therefore, may not be carried away from God, this command obliges us to look upon Him as the author of all the good that ever we *had*, or *can* enjoy; and the more persuaded any man is of *this*, the more he must love God.

For this very reason, every faithful christian loves the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart and soul; being persuaded that Jesus Christ has redeemed him from the greatest misery, and purchased for him the greatest good; that therefore he must love Him as his *Lord and God*, Who, by redeeming us, has made us capable of eternal happiness, which by nature we have no pretence to. Well therefore might the Apostle say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema;" let him be cut off from all hopes of mercy; which he would not have said, and have taught us to have robbed God of His honour, but that he knew very well that none but God could redeem us: for if the most excellent creature that God has made could have redeemed us, we should have been bound to have loved that creature with all the powers of our souls; that is, *equal with God*, which would be abominable idolatry.

1 Cor. 16. 22.

But to proceed: the *Second Command* forbids the making of any image to represent God, lest men should entertain mean thoughts of God, and imagine that He is like any thing in nature, and so love Him less than He ought to be loved.

The *Third Command* aims at the same thing;—to *preserve,* and to *increase,* the *respect due to God.* For we are forbidden even to *speak of God,* but after the most serious and worthy manner; that both we ourselves, and all that hear us, may be led to *love* and *reverence* that great and glorious name—*The Lord of Hosts.* And lest people should think nothing of *words,* which are forgotten as soon almost as spoken, God declares, that He will certainly punish such sinners who speak lightly of Him, as if He were an idol, which did not hear, or could not punish, those that speak of Him with contempt; who do not respect Him themselves, and who teach others not to love Him.

Lastly; the *Fourth Command* aims at the same thing;—to *secure,* and to *promote,* the *love of God in the world.* For God has separated one day in every week, and bound all that own Him for their God *to keep it holy,*—not to do their worldly business on *that day;* but to remember that God is their *Creator* and *Redeemer,* to adore Him as such, to hear His holy Word, to exhort and provoke others to love and to good works.

Thus you see, that the First Table of the Law—its great design is, to promote the love of God amongst men. And for the Second Table, the Apostle saith expressly, "that love is the fulfilling of the Law" relating to our neighbour. For these commandments of the Second Table,—"thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet;" all aim at this; to oblige us to *love our neighbour as ourselves,* by forbidding us to do him any hurt, and obliging us to do him good when it is in our power. Rom. 13. 8, 9.

In short; the *love of God* and *of our neighbour* was the end of the Law. Such as had any right apprehensions of religion (you see) understood it so; while such as were carnal perverted the design of the Law, and the very Law itself. They looked upon Circumcision, and Sacrifices, and other

SERM. XXXVII.

ordinances of the Law, as things *in themselves* acceptable to God, and as sufficient expressions *of their love to God:* they acknowledged it their duty to love their neighbour; but then they called nobody their neighbour but those of their own race and faith.

Our Lord Christ has given us a better notion of charity,—of the love we owe to God, and to our neighbour; that is, He has given us the true spiritual meaning of the Law, and the design of all true religion: and this is what by the blessing of God I am going to explain to you, by shewing you, *First,* What is meant by the love of God. *Secondly,* How it must be obtained. *Thirdly,* What will be the certain effects and fruits of loving God with all our hearts.

After which we will consider the other branch of charity, *the love we owe to our neighbour.*

I. We will first enquire *What is meant by the command of loving God with all our hearts.*

Now, love is a natural passion. If we see any thing which we think worthy of our love, we are immediately fond of it, we are unwilling to part with it, we are very uneasy when we are forced to it. In short, our hearts are united to it, and our happiness depends upon it. We had need therefore to be very careful, that what we set our hearts upon be in truth worthy of our love, or else we are sure to be miserable at the last. And this is the true reason why *the love of God* is made our *first* and *great duty, because God only can make us happy.*

We may fancy that *pleasures,* or *riches,* or *honours,* or a thousand things besides, would make us happy, if we had them; but the experience of all the world may convince us, that all these *are vanity,* and *vexation of spirit:* the pleasure they afford cannot last always; but a too great fondness for them will always be followed by fearful apprehensions of a future account, and a comfortless end, if not bitterly repented of.

Well then, since we are but too apt to love where we should not,—to love what will but make us miserable, our merciful God has been pleased to direct us where to place our *first love,* even *upon God Himself,* which no man ever repented of. For being infinitely worthy of our love, both as He is the fountain of all goodness, and as He is good to every

particular man,—whoever considers this attentively cannot but love Him. It is for this reason that St. John saith, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God;" intimating, that the love of God is the necessary effect of the knowledge of God. [1 John 4. 8.]

Men fancy that they know what God is, though they have never seriously considered in what He excels all other beings; and so their *love*, like their *knowledge*, is very scant and unworthy of God.

They do not consider, that *God is Everlasting;* and that nothing is so, that we are apt to doat on.

They do not consider, that *God is Almighty*, and that He can do abundantly more for us than we can ask or think.

They do not consider His *infinite goodness*, of which every creature in heaven and on earth is a sharer.

They do not consider the favours they have received from God, the happiness He has promised them, nor the blessings they hope for.

In short; if men do not love God, it is because they do not *know* Him, they do not *think* of Him.

But what is it to love Him with all our heart and soul? Why, it is to have the highest esteem for Him; it is to love Him above all other things. It is to love nothing that we know He does *not* love; it is to delight in knowing His pleasure, and to be pleased with what we know will please *Him;* it is to think ourselves happy in having *His word* for our guide, *His providence* for our security, *His goodness* for our dependance; it is to be jealous of His honour, to pray that His kingdom and authority may be established in the earth, and that His name may every where be adored; it is to suffer any thing for His sake, rather than displease Him; it is to be, *with pleasure*, whatever *He* would have us be.

Gracious God! if this were our case, how happy should we be! How easy would love make His yoke! We should obey Him with pleasure; and we should despise all the little baits, which every now and then would draw our hearts from God. We should run with patience the race that is set before us; being assured of His care now, and of His favour hereafter. The changes and chances of this mortal life would not af-

SERM. XXXVII.

fright us, when the Governor of the world is our protector. All the duties of religion, instead of being a burden, would be our delight. We should delight to lay all our wants before *Him* Whom we love; we should deny ourselves without pain, when we know we please our God by doing so. Nay, Repentance itself, *that bitter duty*, would become a pleasure, when it would have this certain effect, to make us love God more passionately, Who is so good as to forgive us our trespasses. Lastly; how easily should we, on all occasions, know the will of God, being assured of this by our Lord Himself:—*He that desires to do the will of God, shall know the doctrine whether it be of God.*

[John 7.17.]

II. You see, good christians, what it is to love God, and the happiness of such a state. You cannot but think it a very desirable grace, and such as every body should strive to be possessed of. And this, in the second place, is what I would propose to your consideration, namely, *How we may possess our hearts with the love of God.*

Now, as the end of all true religion, *from the beginning*, was to plant the love of God in the world; so it is the peculiar excellency of the Christian religion, where it is in good earnest embraced, to do this most effectually. For the Christian religion gives us the most *worthy thoughts of God;* that He is great and good *in Himself*, and that He is *good to us.* For even when we were enemies unto *Him, He loved us;* proposing terms of pardon, and patiently bearing with our neglect of them. For He sent from heaven His beloved Son, with full power to establish an everlasting righteousness amongst men; not such a righteousness as the Jewish nation contended for, which consisted in outward ordinances, but such as is proper to make us *partakers of the Divine Nature.*

[2 Pet. 1. 4.]

What a wonderful instance and discovery of Divine love have we in the Gospel!—God united to our nature, setting us an example how we ought to walk so as to please God; teaching us *humility, self-denial*, and *submission* to the will of God, as the only graces which can procure His favour here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Here (that is, *in the Gospel*) we have a full and free pardon of all our sins, upon the most reasonable conditions; here we

are assured that a sincere endeavour to please God will be accepted, instead of a perfect obedience; here we have liberty and authority to call God our Father, and encouragement to go to Him upon all occasions. In short, the Gospel (as St. Paul, Rom. viii. 2, calls it) *is the Law of the Spirit of Life;* that is, it does not only teach us a set of principles and outward ordinances, but it is such a dispensation as will frame the heart to the love of God; obliging to true and substantial holiness, and enabling us to prosecute it, by giving us all the encouragement and assistance we shall ask and stand in need of.

And though no religion ever *was* or *can* be, without *outward ordinances;* yet in the Christian dispensation, all these aim at establishing the *love of God* in the hearts of christians. We are dedicated to God *in baptism,* that the Spirit and love of God may take possession of our hearts, before the world bewitches us. We are often called upon to *receive the Lord's Supper,* that the love of God and of Christ, *in our redemption,* may not be forgotten in the midst of distracting business. We do not look upon or use these *as charms* that will benefit us without an holy life; but we look upon them as means appointed by God, for creating and preserving His love in our hearts.

We have the same opinion of all other duties. If a christian renounces the world, it is because the Spirit of God has told him, "that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2. 15. If a christian *fasts,* or *prays,* or *denies himself,* it is not that he thinks these things in themselves well-pleasing to God, but only so far as they help to prepare our souls for the love of God, which, of all things, is the most acceptable to God. If a christian submits to the ministers of Christ's kingdom, though they are men of like passions with himself, yet it is because the Gospel assures him, that they are ministers of God for his good, if he obeys them as such; that God is by them reconciling men to Himself; that they have the power of binding and loosing; and that Christ has promised to be with them unto the world's end.

In one word; the Christian religion is most proper to make us humble, by convincing us of our own *weakness,*

SERM. XXXVII.

inconstancy, backsliding, ignorance, and *proneness to all wickedness.*

When it has done this, it encourages us to look up to God in Jesus Christ; to depend upon His love and goodness for light to *know,* for a will to *choose,* and for power to *do,* the will of God. It bids us do what is in our power, and that God, *seeing our sincerity,* will still supply us with more grace, till we come to love Him as we should do, *with all our heart,* and *soul,* and *strength;* which, as has often been said before, *is the end of the Christian religion, and of all its ordinances.*

III. *The fruits and effects of which will be very visible in the lives of all those who have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts.* For where the love of God is the ruling principle of a christian's life, there will follow,

First; A cheerful submission to God's will in all outward dispensations of His providence, believing that His infinite wisdom and goodness always orders what is best for His creatures, whether it be for correction or instruction.

2ndly; An entire obedience to His commands; as knowing, *that this is the love of God,*—thus it will express itself,—*that we keep His commandments.* [1 John 5. 3.]

3rdly; This will be followed by an hearty concern to know the will of God, that we may not displease Him Whom we love, by doing what He would not have done.

4thly; There will be a careful use of the means of grace which God has appointed; for though the love of God is "more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," yet these being helps to the love of God, a christian dare not neglect even the outward ordinances, at the peril of his soul.

5thly; We shall be very jealous of the honour of God, and abhor all such *principles, company,* or *conversation,* as any way tend to lessen His esteem amongst men.

6thly; We shall love and value all that is good in any of His creatures, knowing that so much is the image of God in them.

7thly; We shall be well pleased when things go as God would have them; that is, when piety, and justice, and peace, and charity, are encouraged and prosper.

8thly; We shall be every day less and less fond of, and concerned for, the world, till at last we think nothing too

valuable to be parted with for His sake Whom we love so entirely.

9*thly;* We shall be cheerful under all outward afflictions; faithfully believing that the Lord preserveth them that love Him.

And *lastly;* We shall serve Him with the love of children, not of *servants* or *slaves,* who look upon the duties of Christianity as they do upon the rents and services which they owe to their temporal lords; they do them with pain and reluctance; they sometimes shift them off, and in their hearts wish they were free from them; while a true lover of God serves Him with pleasure, and takes delight in approaching Him.

And are these the marks, are these the fruits and effects of a sincere love of God?

What reason then have we all to blush, and be extremely concerned, to find so few of these instances of the love of God in our hearts and lives!

What reason have we all to beg of God, that for the time to come we may more faithfully observe *this First and Great Command;* that we may not think it sufficient to say that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, when we love a thousand things better; that we may not satisfy ourselves in the bare outward duties of religion, without letting the love of God appear in our lives and conversations!

What reason have we to be very watchful over the corrupt inclinations of our hearts, which, if not well looked to, will always lead us to an excessive love and fondness for the world; which will effectually hinder us from loving God with all our hearts!

And, forasmuch as God has made the love of Himself, and of our neighbour, inseparable, how very much concerned should all christians be, to have *this* mark of their love to God; that is, a tender compassion for the whole creation.

In one word; since there are no hopes of happiness but *to those that love God sincerely;* since all the evils the world complains of are owing to the want of this divine charity; lastly, since our very prayers and religion will be a burden and a sin, while the love of God does not possess our hearts, let us make this our constant prayer to God,—That He

SERM. XXXVII.

would pour into our hearts such love towards Him, that we, loving Him above all things, may obtain His gracious promises, and be made partakers of His heavenly treasure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Whom, &c.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMAND; OR. THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.

Amantissime Jesu! Consummatissimum charitatis exemplar! Largire mihi gratiam charitatis erga proximum, ex gustu misericordiæ divinæ promanantem; ut omnes omnino homines amans, inimicis ignoscens, pro illis orans, et illos amore vincens, aliis ostendere valeam charitatis viam, fructus et felicitatem; et quanti apud Deum sit momenti; propter perfectum amorem Tuum, Redemptor suavissime. Amen.

MARK xii. 32—34.

And the scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth; for there is one God; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

See John 13. 35; Gal. 5. 14; 1 Tim. 1. 5; 1 Pet. 4. 8; 1 John 4. 21.

I HAVE already told you, good christians, in a former discourse, that I made choice of these words, as spoken by a Jew, and approved by our Lord, to shew you, in the first place, that such as were truly spiritual in all ages, and under all dispensations, knew very well, that all outward institutions were in order to *secure*, or to *promote*, or to *create*, the knowledge and love of God, and of our neighbour in the world. For this is the meaning of the scribe's saying, that to love God with all the heart, and with all the soul, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices; not as if sacrifices

SERM. XXXVIII.

could have been neglected, having been ordained by God, to represent and typify the death of Christ; and without which (as the Apostle tells us) "there was no remission of sins."

Heb. 9. 22.

[1 Cor. 3. 7; 7. 19; 1 Pet. 3. 21.]

I observed, that St. Paul saith the same in effect of circumcision, "that it is nothing;" and of preaching, "that he that planteth is nothing:" And that St. Peter saith of *baptism*, that it is not the outward ordinance that saveth us, but as it supposeth a good conscience enquiring of God to know and to love Him.

Now, from these, and such-like sacred Scriptures, we learn, that the end and design of all outward ordinances *are*, and *ever were*, to bring men to the knowledge and love of God and of our neighbour; and that as, on one hand, outward ordinances are not, *at our peril*, to be despised or neglected; neither, on the other hand, are they to be depended on as sufficient unto salvation, unless they lead us to the love of God and of our neighbour; which by our Lord are called THE TWO GREAT COMMANDS; because all other commands and ordinances, whether of the Law or Gospel, were intended to promote and secure *these two;* and because too, all others might be dispensed with, if God should think fit. But the love of God and of our neighbour never were, *nor ever will be*, dispensed with.

I have already shewn you, that the *four first* of the ten commandments aim solely at this,—to *establish* and to *secure* the love of God in the world. By forbidding any other being to be worshipped or depended on; by forbidding men to worship God by an image, lest they should come to have mean thoughts of God, supposing Him to be like any thing that can be represented by an image; by forbidding men even to use the name of God, but after a serious manner; and lastly, by obliging us to set one day in seven apart, to be employed in searching after the knowledge of God, in worshipping Him, and asking His blessing, *that we may love Him more perfectly.*

After this, I explained three things: What we are to understand by loving God with all our hearts; how such a love is to be obtained; and lastly, what are the natural *effects, fruits,* and *signs,* of the love of God dwelling in our hearts.

I now come to set before you *the second branch of charity,*

the *second Great Command*, (as our Saviour calls it,) that is, *to love our neighbour as ourselves;* which if we do sincerely, the Apostle assures us, "we fulfil the whole law" relating to our neighbour. So that it concerns us, above all things, to understand a law on which so much depends. [Rom. 13. 8, 9.]

I will therefore endeavour to shew you, *First*, The meaning of this command. *Secondly*, The obligations we lie under to receive, and to obey it. *Thirdly*, I will set before you such instances and expressions of this love to our neighbour as are every where dispersed through the Word of God. And lastly, because these, very many of them, are very hard to flesh and blood, we will consider what helps God has afforded and directed us to, in order to enable us to do our duty in this particular.

I. We will first consider THE MEANING OF THIS COMMAND. *Love* or *Charity*, then, is such a temper as disposeth a man to *wish well*, and *do well*, to others; it is an hearty good-will to mankind, proceeding from a love for God, Whose creatures we all are, and all, more or less, partakers of His image; it is moreover a *grace* or *gift* of God, which He bestows where He sees men desirous of and disposed for such a favour: for such a disposition to good is not naturally in any man; *the heart being* (as the Prophet speaks) *desperately wicked*, and, without the grace of God, would devise mischief instead of good. It is true, men may have their *favourites;* may wish well to their *friends;* may shew kindnesses for very ill ends; but this is not the love which God inspires, or which He will ever reward. *That* must proceed from Himself; and He bestows it on *those* only who love Him sincerely, and sincerely desire to please Him. [Jer. 17. 9.]

But *who is our neighbour*, whom we are commanded to love? Why, Jesus Christ has taught us in the Gospel, that every man is our neighbour and our brother, though never so mean, though never so different in manners, in opinion, or complexion; for we are all of one blood, all redeemed by Jesus Christ, and all capable of the same happiness. And as long as God thinks any man worthy to live, we are bound to treat him as our neighbour; that is, with love and kindness, *for life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.* If God vouchsafe the one, we ought not to withhold the other. [Luke 10. 29.] [Matt. 6. 25.]

SERM. XXXVIII.

But our Lord has put this out of all doubt, by commanding us *to love even our very enemies:* for if any body might have been excluded from our charity, our enemies most surely would have been of that number. [Matt. 5. 44.]

But how are we to love our neighbour? The command saith, *as we love ourselves.* Now, there is a vicious *self-love,* which is the fountain of all iniquity and injustice, and the very destruction of Christian charity. There is also a *hellish love,* when men, out of affection as they call it, desire to make others as wicked as themselves; who do indeed strive to *please their neighbour,* not *for his good, and to edification,* as the Apostle directs, *but to his destruction.* [Rom. 15. 2; 2 Cor. 13. 18.]

Now, neither the one nor the other of these is a Christian rule, to direct him what sort of love he should *bear* and *exercise* towards his neighbour; but this is the meaning of the command, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;* that is, *as men, fearing God, do love themselves.* None but such receive it as a command; and to such only it is a direction how they ought to love their neighbour: for in truth, men naturally love themselves better than their neighbour; and it is faith alone can change their sentiments: it is that which tells them, that they are made for eternity; and so is their neighbour; that God is our common Father, and all we are brethren; that those who do not love as brethren here, cannot possibly be happy hereafter; that this life is short, and has nothing in it to compare to the happiness of the next; and that nothing can recommend us more effectually to the love and favour of God, than a tender regard for our neighbour; and that it is for this reason He commands us to love him as *ourselves;* that is, *sincerely,* as in the sight of God. [Luke 10. 27.]

It is an appeal to the consciences of men, who know very well how they love themselves; what satisfaction they take in their *own* welfare; how heartily they lament their *own* misfortunes; how solicitous to supply their *own* wants; how careful to hide their *own* defects and faults; how jealous of their *own* reputation; how ready to find excuses for their *own* weaknesses and oversights; and how apt to pardon *themselves* when they have done amiss.

Now any man, who lives in the fear of God, knows very well whether his heart stands thus affected towards his neigh-

bour; if not, he is *self-condemned*, and cannot expect to be justified before God, if he believes that God has made the sincere love we bear to ourselves, a *rule* of the love we should shew to others.

Thus much for the *sincerity* of our love. But then, for the *manner* of expressing this love, we are to consider, how God has commanded us to *shew* our love; how God Himself *treats* those He loves. We know, that God has appointed *magistrates* to punish evil doers; that He has commanded *His ministers* to rebuke the disobedient, and to cast out of His Church such as shall obstinately refuse to obey His laws; we know with what severity He Himself deals with sinners; but then this is because He loves them, and because He would love them eternally: He therefore bears with them, and when He punishes them, He does it with regret; He *pities* them, He gladly receives them when they return to their duty, and forgets all their past offences: and so do all His faithful servants, who know very well that wicked men do neither love God nor their neighbour, and that if they are not reclaimed in time, they are certainly undone for ever: and therefore it is God's express command, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him," for that is indeed to hate him. Thus much for the *meaning* of these words. [Lev. 19. 17.]

II. We shall now consider them *as an express, as an indispensable command of God;* as a law by which we shall be *judged* at the last day; and therefore it behoves us to obey it at our utmost peril.

We are not to question its *reasonableness;* for God cannot command what is otherwise. We are not to say it is hard to be understood; for then the greatest part of men could not know what they are bound to. We are not to say it is impossible to be obeyed; for God has not given a law to His creatures, which He would not enable them to obey, if they are not wanting to themselves: so that obeyed it must be at the peril of our souls.

It is not a *counsel*, but a *command*. St. James calls it a *Royal Law;* St. John calls it the *Law of God;* and our Lord calls it *His Law*, by way of excellency. [James 2. 8; 1 John 4. 21; John 15. 12.]

What is all this for, but to make the strongest impressions upon our souls; and that we may strive with all our might to

SERM. XXXVIII.

understand and obey it in the whole course of our lives? For no love is acceptable to God, but such as is paid in obedience to this command. And yet, God knows, this is generally the last thing we think of, when we place our affections. We respect our betters, because it is in their power to favour us; we love others, because of their endowments; and others, because they are good neighbours, or agreeable company. But where is the command of God all this while thought of?

And this, good christians, is the reason why there is so little true love, and so much uncharitableness in the world. Christians will not consider God as a Lawgiver, who will reward and punish as men shall deserve; who, having given this positive command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" it is our duty to obey, whatever our biassed reason or corrupt wills shall say to the contrary.

If this is the command of God, why then I shall not say, this man has not deserved it at my hands; that man has done me an injury, and I will have the pleasure of doing him another; such a man has said or done too much to be forgiven; I have an aversion for such a man, and I will not speak to him. Why then you are not a christian: this is the language of unbelievers.

A christian is to sacrifice all his aversions to the good pleasure of God. And it is a sacrifice most acceptable to God, when, for His sake, we will do our neighbour no wrong, though we could propose the greatest gain to ourselves; when for His sake, and because He has commanded us not to do it, we dare not *render evil for evil*, though revenge is sweet to flesh and blood; when we will not bear malice in our hearts, though we could never so well conceal it from the eyes of men; when, for *His* sake, we forgive injuries, though it is in our power to return them; when we will not set at nought our brother, for the meanness of his condition, or the misfortunes that have befallen him; when we sincerely desire our neighbour's welfare, and take delight in his prosperity, whatever envy might prompt us to; when, for God's sake, we are ready to do good, and glad to communicate of what He has given us, to comfort the afflicted, to visit the sick, to instruct the ignorant, to protect the oppressed, to reconcile differences, to succour those that stand in need, notwithstanding the

[1 Pet. 3. 9.]

trouble and the expense of these duties. When a man will deny himself, as Jesus Christ did, Who, though He was rich, [2 Cor. 8. 9.] yet *for our sakes* became poor; when those that are strong will bear with the infirmities of the weak, whatever pride [Rom. 15. 1.] would suggest to the contrary:—when these things are done in obedience to the command of God, they are *then a most acceptable sacrifice to the Divine Majesty.*

And let us seriously consider, that God has forbidden all things contrary to charity, not because men can *hurt* Him by their wickedness, but because the uncharitable man cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.

If men live in envy or malice; if they bite and devour one another; if men hate their neighbours, and imagine mischief against them; if they will not submit to their governors in *Church* and *State;* if they shall oppress or vex one another by fraud or violence, by corrupting their neighbour's wife or child, by bearing false witness, or coveting that which is another man's; why, it is sure, God has forbidden all these things: but for what reason? Why, because no man with these dispositions *can possibly* be happy, which God would have all His creatures to be.

III. I will now set before you *such instances and expressions of this command as are dispersed in God's Word, that at one sight you may see your duty.*

Now, the first degree of charity is, *not to despise any man living.* "He that despiseth his neighbour (saith Solomon) Prov. 14. 21. sinneth." And truly there is no reason for it. We are all a race of *poor, vile, sinful* creatures at the best. And he that despiseth his neighbour is subject to the same *misfortunes,* to the same *failings,* to every thing that can make a man *contemptible,* if any thing ought to do so. I say ought to do so; for sure St. Peter would not have bid us *honour all men,* but [1 Pet. 2. 17.] that there is something in every man, for which a charitable man ought to pay some regard.

The next step of charity is, to *do our neighbour no harm,* in *body, goods,* or *good name.* "Love (saith St. Paul) worketh Rom. 13. 10. no ill to his neighbour." It would be very happy, if christians would but conscientiously discharge this part of charity; that they would not trouble or vex one another without cause; that they would not *over-reach* or *defraud* one another; that

SERM. XXXVIII. they would not *slander* and *backbite* one another; that they would not *rashly judge* one another; that they would not draw one another into intemperance, and other sins destructive to soul and body.

After all, this would be but a low degree of charity: for we are bound not only to *do no harm* ourselves, but to *prevent it* in others, as far as we are able. It was for this reason that in Deut. 22. 1. the Law it is commanded, that if any man should see his neighbour's ox or sheep go astray, or his beast lie under a burden, that he should take care of them. What was this for, but to teach men, not only to look every man on his own concerns, but to be concerned for the interest of his neighbour, even where no law but this of charity can oblige us?

We are, in the next place, to take satisfaction in our neigh- [Rom. 12. 15.] bour's welfare, to *rejoice with them that rejoice,* and to be under concern when any thing sad or calamitous befalls him; to *mourn with them that mourn,* as the Apostle directs. We are also to be courteous and obliging to all men. Charity speaks kindly, deals tenderly, grieves not the hearts of the living, and treads softly upon the graves of the dead.

[1 John 3. 17, 18; 4. 20.] But this is not all. "Let us love" (saith the Apostle) "not in word only, but in deed and in truth;" that is, *doing good,* as well as giving good words. And indeed, without this instance of charity, we have no proof of our love for God: *He that hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?*

Lastly; there is another instance of this duty, the most necessary, and yet the most uneasy to flesh and blood; and that is, the Christian duty of *forgiving injuries, and loving our* Matt. 5. 44, 46. *enemies.* Hear the very words of our Lord Christ, "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." "For, if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same?"—men of no principles, men who expect no reward hereafter.

And, as to *forgiving of injuries,* I shall only tell you, that *upon this very duty depends your pardon in heaven.* "If ye

forgive men *their* trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men *their* trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses:" so that there is no mercy to be hoped for from God but upon this condition. Nay, it plainly appears by the parable (set down Matth. xviii. 35), that the lord was more offended with his servant's *unmerciful temper*, than with the loss of *ten thousand talents* that servant owed and could not pay. Matt. 6. 14, 15.

IV. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *What helps God has afforded us, and what inducements we have,* to possess our hearts with a grace every way so necessary to our present and future happiness.

It is a very sad truth, there is very little charity amongst men: and yet as *men* we are made for society; we cannot live without one another. The Gospel makes us all *neighbours;* and Jesus Christ makes us all *brethren.* Why should we not then love as *men,* as *neighbours,* as *brethren?* Indeed we should do so; and I will tell you why we do not.

The Apostle gives it as a mark of the *last* and *worst* of times, when "men shall be lovers of their own selves;" that is, without any regard to the welfare of others. Wherever this vice reigns, there can be no charity, such as the Gospel requires. Our blessed Lord, knowing that as long as men looked upon worldly advantages *as their happiness,* they would despise all that wanted them, He did therefore put the lowest value upon every thing the world doats on. He was pleased to be born of poor parents; He wanted most of the conveniencies of life, yet never repined; He assured His followers, that riches, let them appear never so desirable, are very dangerous things; and would have such of His disciples as thought best of themselves, to be servants to the rest. 2 Tim. 3. 2.

Now, what was this for, but to teach christians that these things ought not to make any difference amongst them; that the world and its favours are not to be depended upon; that therefore christians should not *love* and *hate* on account of *riches,* or *honour,* or *power;* but because Christ has commanded them to love one another, and because this will recommend them to the love of God.

As to that part of charity which is expressed in relieving the poor, you will, I hope, need no other inducement than

SERM. XXXVIII.

that which our Lord sets before you, by His Apostle: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Acts 20. 35.

I have said already, that the obligation to *love* our enemies, and to *forgive* those that have injured us, is so great, that whoever does it not, is shut out from all hopes of mercy: his sins will not be forgiven; his prayers will not be heard. And to a man who has any concern for himself, there need no other arguments to *this* branch of charity.

But the greatest inducement to the love of our neighbour

John 15. 12.

is the consideration of the love of Christ for mankind: "As I have loved you, that ye love one another:" "This" (saith Jesus Christ) "is my command." This shews us in what a sad estate Christianity is at this day, and what little power it has upon its professors, when so positive, so indispensable a command is so ill obeyed.

Let us, good christians, seriously consider this; let us endeavour to wean our affections from the world, and then we shall have very little to fall out about; let us possess our souls with a true love of God, and then we shall, for His sake, love our neighbour as we ought to do; let us consider the love of Christ for *us*, and then we shall blush and be ashamed to see how far short our charity is of His, Who laid down His life for us; and, though we cannot at once change the dispositions of our souls, yet let us at least command our outward actions. These are in our own power, in some measure. We can be just, we can be courteous, we can speak well of men, we can do good offices of friendship, and we can pray for them; and then God, Who by these outward actions sees our sincerity, will at last change our hearts.

And lastly, let us remember, that to love our neighbour, and to love him as ourselves, is a law by which we shall be judged at the last day; for which account, the Lord in mercy fit us all.

In order to which, let us most earnestly beg of God, *to pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God.*

Grant this, O Father, for the sake of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. To Whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

SERMON XXXIX.

OF HOLINESS, WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD.

Perfect, O God, what Thou hast begun in me; inspire me with such a lively sense and clear knowledge of Thy love, that I may be able to convince others of the blessedness and the necessity of holiness, and the way to attain it, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

HEB. xii. 14.

Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

See Rom. 8. 1—3, &c.; 2 Cor. 5. 17; Eph. 4. 23; 1 Thess. 4. 3, 7; 2 Tim. 2. 19; Tit. 2. 14; 1 Pet. 1. 15; 1 John 2. 29; 3. 9, 10.

IT is very much to be feared, that the generality of christians do not know what that holiness is, without which we must never hope for salvation. And yet there is nothing which it concerns men more to know than *this;* because there is nothing more certain, than that a christian, who is not endued with this grace, is no more capable of being happy in heaven, than a sick man is capable of taking pleasure in a sumptuous feast.

But this is not what is generally considered. Most people have a confused notion of heaven, as of a place where all christians will one day be very happy; every one for himself making no manner of doubt, but it will be his *own* portion at the last; in the mean time taking little or no care to be qualified for it. And yet our Lord, to hinder christians from falling into this sad delusion, has assured us, "that wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. 7. 13, 14.

SERM. XXXIX.

And indeed, a very little consideration would convince any man, how *utterly impossible* it is for an *unholy man* to see God in peace; for *to see the Lord,* that is, to know and to enjoy Him, *is to see Him as He is.* It is to see a most *holy, just,* and *powerful* God; One Who, for their sin, turned the very angels out of heaven into hell; Who destroyed the whole world with a flood, for their wickedness; Who, for their unholy lives, destroyed whole cities with fire and brimstone; Who has declared by His own Son, that this should be the very sentence, which (at the day of judgment) He shall pass upon ungodly sinners, "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

1 John 3. 2.

[Matt. 25. 41.]

Now, let us but consider, how we bear the sight of a man like ourselves whom we have unworthily provoked, and who has it in his power to punish us; and then we may judge how a sinner can abide the sight of an angry God, Whose service he has forsaken, Whose invitations he has slighted, Whose commands he has all his life long broken, Whose offers of pardon he has rejected, neither regarding His threats, nor valuing His promises? How can such a sinner possibly bear the sight of such a one, and be happy? And is it not for this reason, that the Scriptures are every where so express, concerning the necessity, *the absolute necessity* of being *converted,* of *becoming new creatures,* of *perfecting holiness in the fear of God?* Is it not for this eternal reason, because WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD?—*No man whatever, no man* who hopes to be saved.

This shews the *delusion* of those who are apt to imagine, that they may be dispensed with for leading a *life of holiness,* either on account of their *ignorance, bad circumstances,* their *profession, worldly business,* their *age,* or the like. If no man, without this qualification, shall see the Lord, then neither the rich nor the poor, the master nor his servant, neither the clergy nor the laity, neither the husbandman nor the tradesman, neither the young nor the old, ought to satisfy themselves, ought to be easy, without that holiness which the Gospel requires of all its professors, of all who hope for happiness.

And indeed, as religion, and the holiness it requires, is necessary for every man, so is it consistent with every lawful

calling and employment in the world. There have been holy princes, and holy beggars; holy laymen, as well as holy clergymen; piety in the shop and in the field, as well as in the closet and in the Church. There have been devout soldiers and devout seamen. And God requires it still; which He would not do, were it not *necessary*, were it not *consistent* with every condition of life.

How *necessary* it is, we shall easily see, if we consider the condition we are in, by reason of the sin of our first parents. Indeed, we are all of us ready enough to own that we are subject to sin; and the consequence is, we do many things that displease God, and make Him our enemy; and then it is very natural for us not to love Him, not to desire to be where He is. And until this disorder be mended, God can take no pleasure in us, we can take no delight in Him, we can hope for no favour from Him.

To mend this great disorder, and that we may not be for ever miserable, God has appointed us to be *holy*, as the only way to be *happy:* He has given us *rules* and *means* to make us so; and He has made known to us the danger of not closing with them. It concerns us, therefore, *more than our life is worth*, to be truly informed,

First; In what this holiness consists.

Secondly; What it is which the generality of christians satisfy themselves with, instead of true holiness.

Thirdly; How this habit of holiness is to be attained.

And *lastly;* To have some sure marks, by which we may have the comfort of knowing that we are in the way of holiness, and consequently of happiness.

And these are the things which I would desire you to consider with the most serious attention.

I. We will first consider, *What this holiness is, which is so necessary to our happiness.*

Now all christians, being dedicated to God in baptism, are thereby become HOLY TO THE LORD; that is, God is pleased to look upon them as His own, and to give them laws to govern themselves by; and they oblige themselves to obey these laws. He gives them His Holy Spirit to enable them to do so; and promises them eternal life, if they continue faithful to their vows.

SERM. XXXIX.

Now, if christians, when they come to years of discretion, would lay these things seriously to heart, they would most thankfully make good the conditions promised on their part; that is, they would endeavour to be *holy*, as He is *holy* to Whom they are *dedicated*. But, instead of being so, too many quite forget that they are christians, and fall into such ways of living, as makes God their enemy, and forfeit all the blessings which He had promised them. And most sad would have been the consequence, had not God, Who foresaw this disorder, provided also a remedy; and this is, *a sincere repentance for sins past; and a sincere obedience afterwards.* But then, christians must beware of abusing this goodness; for, *if they fail in these*, THERE ARE NO HOPES OF MERCY.

So that you see that THIS HOLINESS, *without which no man must see the Lord*, must begin in a SINCERE REPENTANCE; in devoting ourselves *anew* to God, and in studying to please Him all our days, by leading a life agreeable to the Gospel of Christ. And most miserably blind are they who will not see the danger of *putting off their repentance;* for while they do so, they *are in the way of damnation.*

Now every sinner who is *startled* at this, and knows that the *grace of repentance* is the gift of GOD, will beg it of Him with the *greatest earnestness*, and *without delay*, as a most necessary preparation for that *holiness*, without which he must be *miserable* for ever.

In what that holiness consists, we now come to consider. And, in general, it consists in such *a prevailing love of God* as makes a christian to hate all sin, as a thing most hateful to God; to be afraid of, and to avoid all temptations to every thing that he believes will displease God: such a love as makes us zealous to promote the glory of God, and to *please* Him in every thing; desirous to know His will, and resolved at all times to obey it; and cheerfully closing with all the *means* which He has ordained to work in us these holy dispositions.

But to be a little more particular, and to consider it, as it has relation to *God*, to our *neighbour*, and to *ourselves*.

Holiness with regard to *God* consists in a *firm faith in God, as our Creator and Redeemer*, in a just dread of His *power*, in a thankful sense of His *goodness*, in a grateful acknowledg-

ment of His *mercies,* in hearing His Word with a glad mind, and in submitting our reason to the revelation He has made of Himself, and of His will; in obeying His laws; and at all times owning our dependance upon Him, by praying to Him for whatever we want, and ever praising Him for His daily favours; in having a great regard for every thing that belongs to *Him,* His *Word,* His *day,* His *house,* His *ordinances,* and His *ministers.* And whoever fails in any of these particulars *wilfully* will fail in a very material part of *holiness,* with regard to God Himself.

Holiness which respects our *neighbour* consists *in loving him sincerely;* that is, in doing to *him* all that in reason we desire should be done to ourselves; particularly, in being just and kind to him, in relieving his necessities; in forgiving our enemies, and praying for them; in comforting the afflicted; in giving good advice to those that stand in need of or desire it; in reproving those that sin, and in being ready to every good work; in a dutiful obedience to our superiors, whether in Church or State; and lastly, in being so exemplary in our lives, as to lead others to *love,* to *fear,* and to *serve* God.

And then, for that *holiness* which relates to *ourselves;* it consists, in keeping the *body pure and undefiled, as the temple of God ought to be,* and the mind as free from errors as possible; in serving God devoutly, and making religion our delight, as it is our duty; in abstaining from every thing that is evil; in remembering our past sins with detestation; and in returning to our duty without delay, whenever we are sensible that we have done amiss; in moderating our desires after all earthly things, whether they be pleasures, riches, or honours; in submitting to the will of God, being content with that condition His providence has ordered for us; bearing afflictions patiently, and endeavouring to profit by them; in denying our own wills and desires, and in weaning our hearts from the world, that we may *love God above all things,* which is the sure principle of holiness, and the greatest happiness of a soul ready to part from the body.

And they that satisfy themselves with any thing less than this holiness which we have now described, they do it at their utmost peril.

II. This will oblige us *to make some reflections upon those*

SERM. XXXIX.

delusions with which too many christians make their minds easy, instead of striving after that holiness which the Gospel requires.

And in the first place, it is but too plain that very many satisfy themselves with the bare name of being christians. And they that would think it a great misfortune to want Christian baptism, can yet be content to live all their days in an utter neglect of the vows they then made *of leading an holy life*. They can be content to do *that* which they would not have the patience to hear any man say they might do with safety; that is, that provided they be christians, it is no matter how careless lives they lead.

Christians would do well to consider what the Spirit of God saith, that we are *heirs of salvation* upon no other terms than these: "that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And whoever does not do so, his Christian name will be of little use to him.

Tit. 2. 12.

The next great mistake is of those who place *holiness* in outward devotion; in attending the public worship; in hearing the Word, and observing ordinances. Christians should consider, that these are only means of attaining holiness; that as such they are necessary to be observed; but that they are otherways of no value in the sight of God, if they do not help to free us from the slavery of sin, cure us of an immoderate love for the world, increase our faith and hope in God, and bring us to love Him with all our hearts, and our neighbour for His sake.

"Who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts?" was the very question which God asked those Jews who were careful to attend the temple service, but took no care to lead a life answerable to such a practice.

Isaiah 1. 12.

There are many who satisfy themselves with leading a moral, harmless life, (as people love to speak,) but without any regard to the law of God, or taking any care to regulate the heart, or to cure its corruptions; and lastly, without acknowledging the necessity of a Redeemer. Now, though this sort of holiness might be commendable in an heathen, yet it will never be accepted from christians. To bring forth *no fruit* was cause sufficient for that sentence upon the barren tree, "Cut it down, and cast it into the fire."

[Luke 13. 7.]

Christians should know, that faith is the only principle of holiness; because it is faith only that can create in us those holy dispositions, of thankfulness to God for His mercies, of loving His law, of desiring to please Him, and of dreading His anger; all which are absolutely necessary to fit us for the vision of God.

There is another sad mistake which many christians labour under, and that is, *in depending upon good purposes.* They know they are not what they should be; they wish, and hope, and resolve, that it shall not always be so; and are so weak as to imagine, that there is something which pleaseth God in such good purposes; though at the same time they suffer the world, its cares, its pleasures, and all its idols, to possess their hearts. Now this is so far from lessening, that it increases their guilt; while they make no better use of those holy purposes which the good Spirit of God put into their minds, in order to lead them to a true conversion.

There is another mistake as fatal and as common; it is that of those, who confess, are sorry for, and forsake their sins for a while, and then return to them again. Now, this is just as much an *holy life,* as that man's is a *regular life,* who lives disorderly till he is sick, takes up till he is well, and then returns to his follies, and does so till death puts an end to an ill-spent life.

Christians are but too apt to seek for their own justification in the bad lives of others. *I am not as bad as that publican* was an old device to make the mind easy without true holiness; and christians follow the example without perceiving it. God grant that the judgment which our Lord has given in this very case may cure all christians of so pernicious a mistake! [Luke 18. 11.]

But then there are those who comfort themselves with *this thought,* that they are no worse than others: *every man has his failings, and I have mine.* So that *covetousness* is one man's failing; *drunkenness* is another's; *whoredom,* perhaps, is another's; *injustice, profane swearing, backbiting, hatred, variance, despising the ordinances of* God, are the failings of others. Now, what a place do christians suppose that heaven is, if such as these shall be its inhabitants? St. Paul's words, if seriously attended to and believed, would cure christians of

SERM. XXXIX. Gal. 5. 21.

this mistake: "I tell you that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And then they may know what is like to be their portion.

Why then, say others, this is enough to make people *fall into despair;* if such a change of heart and life, such a care of the soul, such holy dispositions, are necessary to fit us for heaven and happiness.

Why now, in truth, christians, while they lead unholy lives, *should* despair of salvation. And it would be the greatest cruelty to persuade them to hope well for themselves, until they can be persuaded to live up to that measure of knowledge and strength which God has for the present given them, and according to the condition of life in which the providence of God has placed them. It is not required that christians should be perfect at once, or all equally perfect; but it is absolutely necessary, that all christians should sincerely endeavour to please God to the best of their power, and then they are as perfect as God would have them to be.

We know how hard it will be to cure very many christians of another great delusion,—of thinking that they have *time enough* before them to get such habits of holiness as the Gospel requires. Some think they are *too young* to set about so serious a work; others imagine that worldly business will excuse them for the present. Let us put these and such-like pretences into their true language, and see how it will sound: it is too soon to be *holy;* that is, it is too soon to love God, to keep His commands, to strive to please Him: but when I have had my share of worldly pleasures, as others have had before me, which I cannot have if I should *now* devote myself to God, *then* I will begin to be holy. When I have got wealth enough to make the remainder of my life very easy, which I cannot do so soon as I would, without breaking some of God's laws, *then* I will become a new man. I know it may be said to me, as it has been to thousands before me, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." I know likewise, that God hath said, "To-day, if ye will hear My voice, harden not your hearts; lest ye never enter into My rest." I know too, that the longer I go on in the ways of sin, the harder it will be to take up. But all this

[Luke 12. 20.]

[Ps. 95. 7, 8.]

shall not discourage me; I will go on, though I perish eternally.

This, I say again, is the *true language* of such as *put off their conversion.* Let but people speak in these words, and see how it will sit upon their minds.

And this brings us to the last and great mistake of all, which is, of those many who place all their hopes of being *holy* and *happy,* IN A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE. Most people being serious when they come to die, and shewing a great concern for having lived no better, this is called repentance. And it being often said of such as had lived bad lives, *that they made a very good end;* and people, in their last wills, leaving their souls to God, in hopes that He will receive them into paradise, as sure as their friends will give their bodies a Christian burial; and none returning from the dead, to shew the sad mistake; hence it is, that unthoughtful people flatter themselves with vain hopes, that all almost are happy when they die.

Christians would do much better to conclude, that God will not depart from the declaration He has made: "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" and therefore all, who live without holiness, *must* die without hopes of mercy. And then, what will all these sad delusions we have mentioned profit those who depend upon them? Happy they who lay hold of the present time, and by a speedy conversion enter into the way of holiness, and continue in it unto their lives' end!

III. And this brings us to consider, *How this holiness is to be attained.* It is not the work of *nature* but of *grace,* to "perfect holiness in the fear of God." It is for this reason 2 Cor. 7. 1. we are obliged to make use of all those *means,* which God has appointed to fit us for heaven; the chief of which are, the *Word,* and *Prayer:* by the first our *Faith* is increased, and by the second our *Graces.*

Now every christian, whose heart God has touched with a sincere desire of becoming holy, (for it is to such only one can speak to any saving purposes,) must seriously consider, what God has made known in His Word concerning *Himself,* His *will,* and concerning *mankind.* For instance: in *that Word* we see our own *corruption,* our *weakness,* and our *danger.*

SERM. XXXIX.

We there read, how men, ever since there were men, have been provoking God by their wickedness, and how God has punished them continually. We there learn, that we are all of the same race and make; all subject to the same sins, and to the same punishment.

The same Word makes known to us the *great goodness of God;* that in order to rescue us out of the power of the devil, and to deliver us from the slavery of sin, He has put us under the government of His own Son; and has promised to make us eternally happy, if it be not our own fault. That He is so good as to call us His children, that we may live as becomes children of so holy a Father; and that we may depend upon His *love,* upon His *promises,* and upon His *assistance,* as a child may do upon the love of a tender father.

And knowing that if He should suffer us to follow our own natural inclinations, we should certainly ruin ourselves, He has therefore given us *laws,* not only to keep us from sin and misery, but to make us partakers of a divine nature; that is, to make us *holy,* that we may be capable of being *happy.*

That we may have these laws always before us, He has appointed His *ministers* to explain them, and to sound them continually in the ears of all such as shall be disposed to hear and to obey them: and to all such He has promised His Holy Spirit, to enlighten their understandings; to enable them to keep His laws; and to overcome all the difficulties they can possibly meet with.

And lest the difficulties of an holy life should affright them, or the commands of Jesus Christ should seem hard to flesh and blood; this same *Word of God* sets before us the very different portions of good and bad men in the next life, in these most affecting words: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

John 5. 28, 29.

And now, what has a christian to do, who has any concern for his everlasting well-being, but to lay hold of the other *great means of salvation?* and that is, PRAYER, *which is the only sure remedy for all our wants and disorders?* What has a

sinner, who is awakened with these truths, to do, but to beg of God to give him a true sense of his unhappy state, and grace and strength to break his bonds? What has he to do, but to put his cause into the hands of *Jesus Christ*, Who is our Advocate and Peace-maker with God; the price of Whose blood is sufficient to procure a full discharge of all his sins; to beg of *Him* to remove all those hindrances to a true conversion, which the devil, or his own corrupt nature, have laid in his way; and to give him that repentance to which He has promised mercy and pardon?

He will also beg of GOD, to create in him a new heart, to enable him to wean his affections from things temporal, to redeem his misspent time, and faithfully discharge the duties of his place; to convince him of the necessity of *mortification*, of *self-denial*, and of *watching* continually; that he may lay hold on all occasions of doing what he believes will please God, and of avoiding what God has forbidden.

And if to his prayers he adds the often thinking of what must come hereafter, the thoughts of *death* will help to cure him of a too great fondness for this world; the thoughts of a *day of judgment* will oblige him to strict holiness, justice, and charity, that in that day of visitation he may find mercy; the fear of *hell* will oblige him to take any pains here, that he may escape the bitter pains of eternal death; and the hopes of *heaven* will help to sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life.

These are the most sure means of attaining *holiness*. And as no man who hopes for heaven can be excused from being *holy*, so no christian (especially amongst us) can pretend to want the means of becoming so.

Every christian has an opportunity of *hearing the Word of God*, and of learning his duty; of joining in the prayers of the Church for every *grace*, for every *virtue*, for every *blessing* he can possibly stand in need of, which God never denies to the sincere, and which the most *unlearned* have a right to, as well as the most *learned*, provided the heart be right; for there is the defect, if any, and never in the means.

Whoever therefore aspires after holiness, and lays hold of the means, *will certainly be renewed by the Spirit that is in him*. And though to *us* evil habits may seem incurable, and

SERM. XXXIX.

[1 Thess. 4. 7.] true holiness almost impossible, considering our corrupt affections, yet they are not so to HIM *Who hath called us unto holiness;* and Who, by doing so, has obliged Himself to give us all necessary assistance. But then, let us remember, that we never shall be *holy*, never *happy*, without our *own sincere endeavours.*

And now you see, good christians, what a great value you ought to have for the Word of God, by which we obtain that [Acts 15. 9.] faith *which is necessary to purify the heart.* You see that all Eph. 4. 12. they who despise God's ministers, who "are ordained for the perfecting of the Saints," are out of God's way of becoming holy. His *Word*, His *day*, His *house*, the *Sacraments*, are all called holy, because God has appointed them as *means* to make us holy, and to keep us in the way of holiness.

Lastly; you see the blindness of those who pretend to be righteous and holy upon principles of natural reason, without the Word and the grace of God. They are ignorant of *this truth*, that no man can be holy *but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ;* that is, who receives Him as his *Saviour*, his *Pattern*, his *Mediator*, his *Sovereign*, and his *Lawgiver.*

IV. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *How a christian may make a judgment of the state he is in, with respect to this so necessary a qualification.* But this, at present, I must do in a very few words, having already detained you too long.

And in the first place, let us lay this down for a truth, *that the manner of our life is the only sure proof of our holiness.* We are sure that we ourselves are alive, because we act like living men. Now, if we live and act like christians, we may be *as sure* that we are living members of Christ's body, and in the way of holiness. And we know that we live like christians, when we love God and keep His commandments, *this being the only sure proof of our love of God.*

When therefore we are sure that we do not live in any known sin, when sin is uneasy to us, when we avoid it and all temptations to it, and by this means get the mastery over our corruptions; when we keep our hearts pure, and suffer no sin knowingly to harbour there, which is *the only sure sign that we fear God, the searcher of hearts;* when we pray to God continually for light to know, and power to do our duty,

and conscientiously make use of the ordinary means of grace; when the commands of God are no longer grievous to us, and the great truths of the Gospel affect our hearts, and make us more serious, more charitable, more just, more temperate, more devout; why then we conclude we are certainly in the way of holiness; especially if we are careful to discharge the duties proper to our state and condition of life, for which we shall be most accountable at the great day.

If the *rich*, for instance, are rich in good works; if the *poor* are contented with their lot; if *young people* are modest, and careful to preserve their reputation and their innocence; and *married* people are mindful of the vows they made before God, and live in peace and godliness. If *parents* bring up their children in the fear of God, and honestly provide for their necessary support; if *masters* take care that their servants live as becomes christians, and treat them as such with humanity and justice; and *servants* are faithful in what belongs to their place and trust; if *men of trade and business* act uprightly, without taking advantage of the necessities or ignorance of those with whom they deal; if such *as are in affliction* do patiently submit to the chastisement of the Lord; and such *as are in prosperity* be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God; if such *as are ignorant* are desirous to learn their duty, and thankful to those that are willing to instruct them; if they that *are in authority* consider that they are in the place of God, and resolve to govern with justice and integrity, and their *subjects* yield them due obedience without defrauding them of their tribute; and lastly, if *Pastors*, mindful of the great account they must give, are solicitous for the good of their flock, and these are ready to follow their godly admonitions. These are all instances of that holiness which God has commanded, which He is pleased with, and which He will reward, provided they are performed in obedience to His laws.

"Every man, therefore, that has this hope" (of seeing God in peace), "must purify himself even as He is pure." 1 John 3. 3. If death overtakes any of us, before this is done, we are ruined for ever.

Every man who wishes well to his own soul, cannot but be very thoughtful when he considers these things. Let us not

SERM. XXXIX.

stifle such thoughts; they are certainly from the good Spirit of God: let us therefore dwell upon them; let us improve them to our great advantage.

Let such as have arrived to any good degree of *holiness*, bless God for it, and beg of Him the grace of perseverance. Let such as are yet unconverted, beg of God the grace of conversion: it is the only thing they ought to pray for, and it is the only favour God will grant them; and He will certainly grant it to every one who asks it sincerely. And it is this very thing which will be the condemnation of all such as die unconverted;—that God called them to *holiness;* that He put them into the way of attaining it; that they might have had all necessary assistance for asking, and heaven and happiness for their pains, and yet they continue insensible, and die without hopes of mercy.

May God awaken all such as have it yet in their power to work out their salvation with a salutary fear of what must come hereafter! And may every soul of us consider of what moment it is to know whether we are like to be *justified* or *condemned,* when we shall appear before God; there being no truth more certain than *this,* which therefore I would leave upon your minds; *that whoever lives without holiness, will die without any reasonable hopes of mercy.*

May God Almighty set this home upon all our hearts, for the Lord Christ's sake. To Whom, &c.

SERMON XL.

ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ. THE RESURRECTION; OR, THE REWARD OF HOLINESS.

LUKE XX. 34—36.

Jesus answering, said unto them, the children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

See Job 19. 26; Isa. 25. 8; Matt. 25. 34; John 11. 26; Rom. 8. 18; 1 Cor. 15. 19, 42—44; 2 Cor. 5. 1; Eph. 1. 18; 1 Pet. 1. 3; 1 John 3. 2; Rev. 22. 14.

THESE Sadducees did, in very deed, argue like themselves; that is, like men who *did not believe a resurrection.* Whether our Lord's answer convinced them of their error, or how far their prejudices might excuse them before God, is not material for us to know; especially since *this point* is *now* put out of all manner of doubt amongst christians, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead. But this is very material to be observed, that their error proceeded from *their not knowing the Scriptures.* [Matt. 22. 29.]

This was their great crime; they would not believe a *future state,* because they could not answer all the objections that the wanton wit of man could invent against such a state. The truth is, they were very fond of every thing that might confirm them in their unbelief, and neglected the Scriptures, which alone could have given them a sure account of what they doubted. And thus it will always be, where people will not believe the Word of God, when it is not agreeable to their own weak reasonings.

SERM. XL.

However, we are no losers by these people's infidelity and curiosity; for in convincing them of their error, our Lord has made known one of the most important and comfortable truths; namely, that at the general resurrection, such as have behaved themselves worthily in this life shall become immortal as the angels; that instead of a *natural* or *animal body*, which stands in need of food and air to support it, they shall have a *spiritual body*, which will need neither; that in *that* state there will be no need of marriage to preserve their kind, *for they shall never die*, but shall continue in the presence of God, in a state of perfect happiness for ever.

And let us not imagine, that there was no need of such a revelation as this to encourage us to do what God expects from us, in order to our happiness. They that know any thing of themselves, know very well, with what difficulty we are brought even to think of another life: but to love it better than this; to deny a present pleasure for one that is to come; to suffer here in hopes of being rewarded hereafter; there was an absolute necessity that the reward should be *very great*, and *very certain;* and so it is: *they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, shall be equal unto the angels;* that is, after death they shall be happy, and immortal as *they*.

And who is it that affirms this? No less a person than the Son of God; Whom God sent from heaven on purpose to make known to us *this*, amongst other things,—that men may be much happier in the next world, than they can possibly be in *this*, if it be not their own fault; particularly, He assures them, that after the resurrection they shall *never die any more; their inheritance shall be for ever; they shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.*

[1 Pet. 1. 4; 5. 4.]

It is true, these are general expressions; but the Apostle tells us why the happiness of the next life is not described more particularly: "Eye (saith he) hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him;" that is, it is utterly impossible so to describe or compare the state of the life to come to any thing we *see*, or *hear*, so as to be able to comprehend it. For this, we must either believe God's word, or continue unbelievers to our own

1 Cor. 2. 9.

great loss. We are to live *here by faith, not by sight;* that is, we must order our conversation not by what we see, or can understand, in *this* world, but by what we believe and expect in the *next*. [2 Cor. 5. 7.]

But then, that christians may not be charged with being too easy of belief, in expecting an happiness which they are never like to enjoy, God has been pleased to give us the utmost proof that men in reason can desire, that *all the glorious things that are spoken of the city of God,* the habitation of the blessed, *are certainly true:* He has, I say, given us assurance of this, *in raising our Lord from the dead.* [Ps. 87. 3.]

To *this* the Apostles and first christians appealed, as to a *matter of fact,* of which they had been eye-witnesses, for the truth of which they were ready to lay down their lives, and at last did so. And the providence of God so ordered matters, that the enemies of Christianity should have nothing in reason to say against the truth of Christ's resurrection. They set a watch upon His grave; their own watch informed them of what had happened when He rose from the dead; they were forced to give them money to stifle the truth, and set about a lie; and yet they themselves had not the assurance to persist in this lie, when Peter and John told them, that to their own certain knowledge He was risen from the dead; they had not *then* the face to say, "that His disciples had stolen Him away," but only, "you would bring this man's blood upon us." Nay, they themselves were so far from believing their own lie, that they consented to the counsel of Gamaliel, lest, if what the Apostles affirmed should be true, *they should be found at the last to fight against God.* [Acts 4.] [Matt. 28. 13; Acts 5. 28, 39.]

In short, in those days in which these things were done, the truth of Christ's resurrection was not questioned. The circumstances of the thing, the number of the witnesses, their resolution to die rather than to deny what they had seen and heard; in the mean time, the great power of God attending them in *signs,* and *wonders,* and surprising *miracles,* stopped the mouths of gainsayers; and the Gospel, *founded upon this truth,* spread over all the world.

They believed Jesus Christ to be a Divine person sent from God; and sent from God to reveal His will and purposes to men. They therefore thought themselves obliged to enquire

SERM. XL.

diligently, what He had taught while He lived amongst men, what He had promised to His faithful followers, what men might expect by embracing His Gospel. And upon the whole they found, that Jesus Christ had not gained disciples by vain promises of worldly advantages. No: He told them plainly, that the next world was the place where christians were to expect their reward; that in the mean time they were to live by faith in His promises. He assured them likewise, that to try the sincerity of their faith, they should meet with a great many troubles, *that their faith and hope might be in God;* that He expected nothing from them but what He Himself would undergo. And He did do so; for, "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame;" for which God hath highly exalted Him; and so He will do all His faithful followers. "They shall be equal to the angels; they shall be the children of God;" that is, they shall be *immortal* and *happy*.

[Heb. 12. 2.]

[Luke 20. 36.]

These are the happy circumstances which all good christians shall be placed in at the resurrection. And God (you see) has been most surprisingly careful and merciful to us, not to let us want all the evidence that our hearts can desire, that this shall be our portion, if we are not wanting to ourselves; this being one of the most powerful motives to fit us for such a state.

For a firm belief of the unspeakable happiness of those *who die in the Lord*, and whose portion shall be with the *spirits of just men made perfect*, who shall be the children of God, and equal unto the angels,—a firm belief and expectation of this, will have these three excellent effects: *First;* It will help to sweeten all the bitter passages of this mortal life. *Secondly;* It will help to cure us of a too great fondness for this world, which we are too apt to doat on, and which hinders us very much in our way to heaven. *Thirdly;* It will help us to run with patience the race that is set before us; that is, to perform all the duties of Christianity with cheerfulness.

I. *A firm belief of immortal happiness will help to sweeten all the bitter passages of this mortal life.*

Whatever the world promises, sad experience, as well as the wisest of men, assures us, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." But this is not the worst of it; there are afflic-

[Eccles. 1. 14.]

tions which are unavoidable, and would be *intolerable*, if we had no hopes of seeing an end of them.

But death, you will say, will put an end to all the troubles of *this* life: be it so. But then this very remedy is itself the greatest of all afflictions; for a man to know that he *must* die, and not to know what his condition shall be after death. Well might the Apostle say, such men, "through fear of death, are all their life long subject to bondage." Heb. 2. 15.

God be praised, this is not the case of christians, unless they are very much wanting to themselves. They may suffer, but if they keep in their eye the rewards of a future state, and live like men that do so, they *cannot* be miserable. When a man can see an end of his miseries, and by bearing them as becomes a christian, can be sure of a reward,—and of such a reward as the best and wisest men have willingly laid down their lives to obtain; this will support his spirits, and fill his soul with comforts, while his body is in pain; while disasters follow one another; when friends forsake him, and enemies oppress him; while the world frowns upon him, and poverty threatens him like an armed man.

In all these cases, a good christian labours to support his soul with such considerations as these: a time is coming when these afflictions will be over. Though I am now beset with infirmities, yet hereafter I shall have a body entirely free from pain and disorders of all kinds. Though I am poor *now*, yet I have this comfort, that God can make me sufficient amends in the next world for what I want in this. In the mean while, I know *this* to my comfort, that God has very often tried the faith of His best servants after a more severe way, in order to fit them for greater glory. It was thus He dealt with Job, whom He suffered to become the most miserable of men, before He would reward his patience and piety with a crowd of unexpected blessings. It was thus that God visited the man after His own heart, even after He had designed him for the greatest happiness. In short, it was *thus* the Son of God Himself was dealt with; this was the way which He hath sanctified by His blessed example, commanding His disciples to follow His steps, encouraging them in their sufferings with the promises of eternal blessings.

II. Secondly; *A firm belief of what we shall be after the*

SERM. XL. *resurrection, will help to cure us of a too great fondness for the world.*

What would an angel give for the best estate or place upon earth? Why do not we believe that a time is coming, when we shall be as much above all the glories of this world, as the angels are *now?* Yes, we believe this; but our fault is we do not lay it to heart; we do not compare the happiness of heaven with the present advantages we either aim at or enjoy. We do not, as the Apostle tells us all true believers do,

2 Cor. 4. 18. "Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal;" that is, a true believer keeps his eye upon what he expects hereafter, and will not be diverted from pursuing a crown of glory that fadeth not away, by every tempting trifle he meets with in the way.

Thus, when Abraham had God's promise that he should have a son, that his seed should in after-ages possess that land in which he was a stranger, he was as well satisfied as if the thing had already come to pass, and he acted accordingly. He weaned his affections from his native country; he would not be tempted to stay in fruitful Egypt any longer than his necessities required; neither his own nor his wife's great age hindered him from depending upon the promises of God; and God rewarded his faith, and answered the desires of his heart.

Why now, good christians, we have the word of the Son of

[1 Cor. 15. 54.] God for it, that in a short time, "when this mortal shall have put on immortality," we shall be as happy as the angels of God. Then we shall be amazed at the madness of those who preferred a temporal *gain*, or *pleasure*, or *honour*, to the glories of heaven, which will last for ever.

And oh! that christians would but lay this seriously to heart, before it is too late; that they would behave themselves

[1 Pet. 2. 11.] as *strangers and pilgrims in this world*, and look upon the next as the place where true joys are to be found. Then should we not be tempted with earthly pleasures, nor doat upon the things now, which we shall then despise and abhor; and be astonished that creatures made for, and having the promise of eternal happiness, if they will but in good earnest

strive for it, should yet choose eternal death, rather than renounce a present, short, unsatisfactory enjoyment.

We find by sad experience, that not only the enjoyment, but the *very desire* of the good things of this world, does very much indispose, and hinder us from pursuing the prize of our high calling, with that earnestness which it deserves. "How hardly (saith our Lord) shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." [Luke 18. 24.] For they have so many and strong temptations to love this world, and set up their rest here, that the happiness of the world to come finds no place in their thoughts.

Happy then are they, who have seen the vanity of this world, and have so long considered the blessings of the world to come, that faith has made those blessings *present* to them; and they see and feel (what others laugh at them for) that for the joys of heaven, *though at a distance*, one ought to part with any satisfaction upon earth.

III. Thirdly; *A firm belief of the consequences of the resurrection will very much help us to run with patience the race that is set before us:* that is, it will help us to perform all those duties of Christianity, which are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven. For if we believe that God is a rewarder of such as *diligently* seek Him; if we are thoroughly convinced of *this*, and that the reward we expect will be inconceivably great; then shall we apply ourselves to the obtaining it, like men that are really in earnest, with *unwearied diligence*.

And truly, there is need of a *right understanding* of these things, of a *firm faith*, and very *lively hopes*, and most *glorious promises*, to make us go through so many Christian duties, which are so uneasy to flesh and blood, and yet are indispensably necessary to eternal happiness.

For my part, I should be at a loss for arguments to persuade a man, either to *watch*, or *pray*, or to *deny himself*, or to *be in charity* with all men, if I could not first convince him that he will be the greatest gainer by doing these things; particularly, that he has the promise of a most *glorious reward;* that he has many and powerful enemies that envy him such a reward, and will not fail to divert him from pursuing it, if he is not very *watchful* over himself; that God

SERM. XL.

will give him all the assistance that is necessary, provided he *prays* for it with the seriousness of one that is in good earnest; that the life and joys of heaven will be quite of another kind than those which we are naturally fond of here; that therefore we must wean our affections from sensual pleasures, bring ourselves by degrees to follow the will of God with readiness and satisfaction, whenever we know it; this being one of the duties, and the delight of the inhabitants of heaven: in short, that we must use some *self-denial* to effect this, and to alter the bent of our inclinations, or else we shall never be happy as we hope to be.

Lastly; if I could convince him, that in heaven there is *no sourness of temper*, no *selfish ends*, no *jarring* or *undermining one another*, no *jealousy* and *suspicion*; that such evil dispositions as these will render a man utterly incapable of heaven, where all the inhabitants live in good understanding with one another, and in the strictest bonds of love, rejoicing in one another's happiness, and praising God for His goodness to others as well as to themselves.

When a man is once convinced of this, then he will see how necessary that *charity* is, which the Gospel requires, to help us to get rid in time of such evil affections and habits, as, if not cured *here*, will most surely hinder us of the happiness we expect *there*.

And seeing the reasonableness of these duties, and how
[Col. 1. 12.] absolutely necessary they are, *to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*, a christian will set about them in good earnest, as he hopes for salvation: at least, if this will not prevail with us to do so, nothing else will. St. Paul, therefore, concludes all his discourse of the resurrection, and everlasting life after death, with these
1 Cor. 15. 58. words: "Be ye therefore stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord;" intimating, that the serious belief of an immortal happiness will keep us *stedfast* in the faith, notwithstanding the troubles we meet with; *unmoved* by the temptations of the world: *always abounding in the work of the Lord;* that is, doing the duties of Christianity with patience and joy in the Holy Ghost.

And now, good christians, you see, first, how much it con-

cerns every body who professes to believe the resurrection of the body, and an everlasting life after death, so to order his life in *this* world, that in the next he may be happy.

Consider, secondly, whence you have this assurance of immortal happiness. It is not from conjecture, not from the vain and weak reasonings of men like ourselves, *but from the mouth of the Son of God.* It is *He* who tells us, that the children of the resurrection shall never die, but shall be equal to the angels.

But then observe, thirdly, that the same God of Truth, Who gives us this comfortable hope, assures us, at the same time, that there is something to be done on our part, in order to obtain it. It is not every one who professes to believe these things that shall be happy as angels, but they that shall be *worthy;* that is, they, who through faith in the promises of God, have been encouraged to deny all "ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;" looking for that blessed hope which God has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. [Tit. 2.12.]

So that the belief of a resurrection, and an everlasting life, will easily be perceived to be of little *use* or *comfort* to one who will not be persuaded to prepare for it.

For, fourthly, as death puts the righteous into a state of endless happiness, which truth we very readily close with, so does it send the wicked into a condition miserable beyond expression, which we believe with some difficulty; and yet we are assured of both these truths by the same God of truth, that if either hopes or fears will prevail upon us, we may not want motives to work out our salvation.

Lastly; let us seriously consider, that whether we believe, or do not believe, these things, *that* will not make them true or false: the counsels of God must stand; and if He has declared that He will raise us up at the last day, and judge every man according to his works done in the body; if He has, of His infinite mercy, appointed a place and state of happiness for the righteous, and a place of torment and punishment for the wicked, why then this will be the portion both of the one and the other, whether men believe, whether they think so, or not.

As for such as know themselves to have no religion, no

SERM. XL.

fear of God before their eyes, they know likewise that they are not *worthy*, that is, meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heaven; and without a timely repentance they never can be happy. They know it, and all the arguments in the world cannot give them a greater assurance than their own consciences.

But then there are others, who, because they profess to believe these things, are therefore under no apprehensions of any danger, although they take no thought, no pains, to fit themselves for the heavenly life. They love the world as well as if they desired never to leave it; they run into temptations to sin; what they call repentance is no more than asking God's pardon, and, upon the first occasion, running into the same sins again; in short, they pray without concern to be heard, without a sense of their wants, without being convinced of their own misery, without knowing the danger they are in; and after all, they die in peace, and in hopes of a joyful resurrection.

Why now, my christian brethren, if any of you be conscious to himself that this is his own case, let him know, that none shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, but such who have had their conversation in heaven while they were on earth; who with an eye of faith have seen, and were persuaded of, the glory which God hath prepared for His saints, and make it the very chief business of their life to become worthy, that is, meet for the kingdom of heaven. For, as Jesus Christ died, so He was also raised for us,

2 Cor. 5. 15. "that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him Who died and rose again for us."

Let us therefore, as many of us as are verily persuaded of the truth of these things, let us be persuaded also to raise our hearts and affections above the little concerns of this world. Live in it we must, as long as God is pleased we should, because it is the place appointed for our trial and improvement; but, after all, it is not the place where we are to expect our happiness; nor where we should lay up our treasure, lest, our hearts being there also, we never aspire after that happiness which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Col. 3. 1—4. I shall conclude with the words of St. Paul: "If ye then

be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; that when Christ Who is our life shall appear, then we may also appear with Him in glory." Which God grant, for the sake of the same Jesus Christ.

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XLI.

THE DUTY OF IMPROVING THE TALENTS COMMITTED TO OUR TRUST.

LUKE xii. 48.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.

See Matt. 25. 23; John 9. 41; 16. 24; Acts 17. 30; Rom. 1. 22; James 1. 5; 4. 17.

THESE words of Christ were designed to make us all very serious and concerned, for the account which we must one day give of the talents we have received, and for the opportunities He has afforded us of *knowing* and of *doing* our duty.

"I believe that Jesus Christ shall come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead, and to render to every man according to his works done in the body." This is what every christian professes to believe: but is it possible for any christian, who leads a careless life, to say this, and not to be extremely concerned for the judgment that is then like to pass upon him, and for what must follow *that sentence?* The generality of christians must certainly lie under some *sad delusion*, who *live* in a neglect of the duties of Christianity, and *die* without fearing any danger.

If one seriously considers what this delusion is, it will appear to be this,—*That most christians do hope that they have not so much to answer for as really they have.*

I have made choice of these words of our Saviour, to convince you, that we have, *every soul of us*, more to answer for than we are generally aware of; *that we have, all of us, received much, and much will be required of us.*

I know this will hardly be believed; and one must take some pains to convince christians that it is really true, and that their salvation depends upon it.

I am not now speaking of those to whom God has given excellent parts and understandings, great opportunities of doing good, time to spare, and abilities to learn and to know a great deal: nobody questions but such persons have a great deal indeed to answer for. But that which I would have you convinced of is *this;* that such as are apt to think themselves least accountable will have *much* to answer for, even more than they generally think of.

Is it *knowledge* you want? Do not deceive yourself; you know things as hard to be understood as the things which concern your salvation. Without religion no man must hope to be saved; every man, therefore, is *capable* of knowing as much as God will expect from him, provided he be really desirous to know his duty.

Is it *time* you want? You will not say so, when you consider that religion is the work of the heart, more than of the body; and that a man may be very religious, doing his duty, pleasing God, at the same time that he is about his worldly business.

Is it the want of a *will* you complain of? Be assured of it, that you may have it for asking, if you are sensible of your want, and beg of God to give you a will to be concerned for your soul.

And if it be the *weakness of your resolutions*, and the *corruption of your nature*, that you are afraid and complain of, remember, that the very moment you give yourself to God, He has bound Himself to assist you by an all-sufficient grace.

In short, every christian living knows enough to make him very serious, and concerned for what may come hereafter: every christian who is thus concerned for his soul, *does* or *may* know what God requires of him in order to his salvation: and every christian, who knows this, is bound, at the peril of his soul, to look to himself, lest by his own negligence he be miserable for ever.

Every man, even the most ignorant, knows that he must die, and that in a short time. Every christian knows that

SERM. XLI.

this life is only a state of trial, and that as we behave ourselves well or ill here, we shall be happy or miserable in another life.

What our behaviour ought to be, in order to our being for ever happy when we die, every christian *does* or *may* know, if it be not plainly his own fault.

He knows, for example, let him be never so unlearned, that a good and holy God will always be best pleased with good and holy men, and good actions; and that wicked men will only be fit company for wicked spirits like themselves.

He cannot but know, that if God sees every thing that is done under the sun, he cannot hope to hide any evil action from God; and this will hinder him from doing any ill thing whatever, if he does not stifle his knowledge. And this knowledge will make him strive to do what he believes will please God, because he knows that God, Who sees him, will one day reward his piety.

The most ignorant christian feels the corruption of his own heart, and he knows that he cannot, of himself, mend his own nature; but then God has promised and *will* give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him; the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the Spirit of knowledge, true godliness, and holy fear,—*to lead them in the knowledge and obedience of His word, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life.*

Every christian, knowing this, will be without excuse, who does not most earnestly beg of God to give him this Holy Spirit; and who is not very careful not to grieve Him, and drive Him away by any evil deeds.

Every man who knows (and who does not?) that he has done a thousand things to offend and provoke God, will be glad to know, whether, and upon what terms, God will pardon and restore him to His favour. And every christian who is thus concerned will be desirous to know what he must answer for.

Now, that we may be as particular as possible upon a subject of so great concern, and be better prepared to answer our King and Judge *at that day;* I will set before you, in one short view, what will most certainly be required of every soul of us, even of the most ignorant and unlearned.

It will, in the first place, be required of every christian, that he has given entire credit to the word and will of God, contained in the Holy Scriptures; because these Scriptures have been confirmed and established by undoubted miracles, and have been received in all the Christian world.

And because these Scriptures were written by the direction of the Spirit of God, and cannot be understood or received but by the assistance of that Spirit by which they were written, it is our duty, and it will be required of us, that we have prayed to God for a true understanding of the same.

The first and great design of these Scriptures being to establish us in the true faith, "without which it is impossible to please God," it will be required of us that we have received the truths contained in them with the simplicity of children, that is, with submission, without questioning the wisdom of God in giving them, His authority, or His goodness, however hard they appear to be to our reason or understanding.

Especially it will be required of us, that having plainly seen the *wisdom*, the *power*, the *justice*, and the *goodness* of God, manifested in these Scriptures, we shall severely answer for it, if we behave not ourselves accordingly: that is, if we do not fear to offend this great and just God; if we do not live as in His sight; if we do not *depend* upon His *word*, His *truth*, and *promises*, and *fear* His *threatenings*; if we do not honour His holy name, and serve Him faithfully all our days; we shall be plainly without excuse, and shall dearly pay for it.

And then, forasmuch as these Holy Scriptures assure us, that there is no salvation for any man living, (every one having sinned, and come short of the glory of God,) unless his peace be made with God by Jesus Christ, it will be required of every christian, that he lay hold of and close with this mercy, as he hopes to escape the wrath of God; that is, that he endeavour (according to the capacity which God has given him), that he endeavour to understand the *manner*, and the *conditions* of our redemption by Jesus Christ. For example: that the Son of God took our nature upon Him, that He might, in our nature, suffer what we ought to suffer; "that God laid on Him the iniquities of us all;" and that [Is. 53. 6.] He hath obtained everlasting redemption for all them that obey Him.

SERM. XLI.

It will therefore be required of every soul of us, that we endeavour to obey His laws, and follow His example; that is, to do what we believe Jesus Christ would have us to do, and what we believe He Himself would have done, were He in our place and circumstances. Particularly, it will be required of us, that we set before our eyes His *sufferings*, His *humility*, His *patience*, His *charity*, His *submission to the will of God*, and endeavour to imitate them; that we give entire credit to all that God hath made known to us by His Son, and especially this important truth,—that we must all appear before His judgment-seat; by Whose righteous sentence, "they that have done good shall go into everlasting life, and they that have done evil," and have not repented them of the evil they have done, "shall go into everlasting misery." It will, I say, be required, that we live like people who profess to believe all this, and that we be careful of our *thoughts*, *words*, and *actions*, which must then be judged.

[John 5. 29; Matt. 25. 46.]

And forasmuch as in baptism we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost, that He may sanctify our nature, enlighten our understandings, and give us a power to do what God has commanded us; it will be required of us, that we have not grieved that Holy Spirit, nor driven Him from us by our evil deeds, or by continuing in any known sin.

And this Holy Spirit having made known to us "that God added to His Church daily," that is, from time to time, "such as should be saved," it will be required of every man, as he hopes to be saved, that, by a righteous baptism, he be a member of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, in order to be a partaker of all its blessed privileges.

[Acts 2. 47.]

And it being to the governors and pastors of this Church that Jesus Christ has made this sure promise, "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" that is, to direct them, and bless those whom they bless in His name; it will be strictly required of every member of this society that he attend to the word preached by them; highly value their prayers and blessing, and submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in His ministers.

Matt. 28. 20.

Every christian who professes to believe the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, it will be required of him, that he has had a concern, a fellow-feeling, for all christians; such as there should

be amongst the members of the same body; that he has communicated his talents, whether of *wisdom*, or *riches*, or *power*, to others, in order to make the whole body of Christ as happy as may be.

And, forasmuch as Jesus Christ has commanded, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name;" that is, repentance on man's part, and remission of sins on the part of God; every christian will sadly suffer for it, if this goodness of God has not led him to repentance, has not put him upon begging of God the grace of repentance, even that repentance to which God has promised mercy and pardon. [Luke 24. 47.]

There is not a christian so ignorant, who does not believe and confess this truth, "That the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." And will any christian flatter himself, that this hour will not make a prodigious difference betwixt good and bad livers? John 5. 28, 29.

Is there a christian so ignorant or unlearned as not to know, that now is the time in which we are to choose where, and what, we are to be to all eternity? And will it not be required of every christian who knows this, that he did not set his heart upon a world which he was so soon to leave; and that he has laid up his treasure in heaven, where he did hope to live for ever?

These, good christians, are all truths which we could not have known, had not God revealed them unto us; but now we *do* know them, you see plainly how much depends upon our living as becomes people to whom such things are revealed; that is, that we obey the laws which God has given us to walk by, and that we do not do what He has forbidden, upon pain of His everlasting displeasure.

But how shall we know this? say the ignorant and unlearned; sure much will not be required of us, to whom so little knowledge, so few talents, are given!

Why now, the most unlearned christian, who flatters himself with these hopes, that little will be required of him, will be condemned of his own conscience, (as well as by his great Judge,) when he sees that the duties which he is com-

SERM. XLI.

manded, and the things forbidden him, are in themselves *necessary, reasonable,* and *easily* known; and (what is our great happiness and comfort), when he knows that we shall have all necessary assistance for asking, and that a sincere endeavour of doing what God has commanded will be accepted instead of a perfect obedience.

Will it not then, do we think, be required of every christian, that he make the law of God the rule of his life; that he love and fear God above all things; depend upon His providence; worship Him with reverence; never take His name in vain; that he abhor all manner of oaths, except when called before a magistrate, and then to speak the truth, as he hopes the Lord, Who knows it, will hold him guiltless.

Does not every christian know, and will it not be required of him, that he has conscientiously observed the Lord's day, to keep it holy, by laying aside all business or pleasures which may divert the mind from serving God; by going to the place of public worship, where God is *acknowledged, honoured,* and *prayed to?*

Are not children taught from their very infancy, and will it not be required of them, that they have honoured their parents? And do they not know the meaning of this: that they are to obey them in all lawful things; that they are not to grieve them, by any stubborn or evil course of life; and that they are to assist them, if ever they should stand in need of their help?

And do not all parents know their duty? And they will severely answer for it, if they have not brought up their children in the fear of God; if they have not taken care to have them instructed; if they have not set them a good example; if they have not corrected them when they have done amiss; and if they have not constantly prayed for them.

Will the meanest subject have it to say, that he did not know that it was his duty to obey, and that disobedience and rebellion were grievous sins, for which he was to answer?

Need any servant be told, that he has a master in heaven, to whom he will, one day, be accountable for his fidelity to [Eph. 6. 6.] his earthly master; that if he has been an *eye servant,* that if he has wasted his master's goods or suffered others to do so, that it will be required at his hands?

And the same Lord and Judge of the world will require it of the master, that he hath been just and kind to, and careful of his servants, *there being with God no respect of persons.* [Eph. 6. 9.]

The most *ignorant* knows, as well as the most *learned,* that God will require it of him, if he does any violence or hurt to his neighbour, if he wishes any man's death, if he takes pleasure in the calamities that befal other men, if he is inhuman and hard-hearted.

And they that know, (and who is there that does not?) that they themselves shall stand in need of pardon from God, cannot but conclude that if they do not forgive others, God will not forgive them at the great day.

Whoredom, adultery, and all sins of *uncleanness,* are so contrary to the notion which every body has of heaven, and the happiness we there expect, that the most ignorant christian *cannot, dare not* hope for any favour from God, who has been so unhappy as to fall into these sins, and has not bitterly repented him of his folly.

Drunkenness, intemperance, and an *idle life,* because they send men out of the world sooner than God and nature designed; God has therefore strictly forbidden these things, and will therefore strictly require it of all christians, if they do not obey His commands.

Who will say, that we have not received a mighty blessing, in having the will and laws of God, and the way of life, made known to us, after so plain a manner, that as the Prophet speaks, "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein?" [Isa. 35. 8.] And will not much be required of every christian man, who has these helps to salvation, and will not make use of them?

Will any christian say, that the things which are commanded are too hard for him to observe, who confesseth, that "with God all things are possible," and who knows that God has promised all necessary assistance to them that sincerely pray for it? [Matt. 19. 26.] And what will any christian have to say for himself, who hath such encouragement *to pray to God,* and yet neglects to do it; or does it after such a manner as shews plainly, that he is very indifferent whether God *grants* or *denies* him his petitions?

SERM. XLI.

Christians confess, that the *laws of God* are *holy, just,* and *good,* and that they are designed purely for *our* good; they readily confess their own inability, without the special grace of God, to keep these laws, and yet they will not ask this grace as they should do. Will not such have a great deal to answer for?

And because the most ignorant person may not have it to say for himself, *that he knows not how to pray,* our Lord has given us a most perfect form of prayer, which we may use without fear of praying amiss, provided our hearts be well-disposed: that is, if we are truly sensible of our sad condition, and that we want God's help, and that we resolve to do what He has commanded, to the best of our power.

Will it not then, do we suppose, will it not be required of every christian, that he has let no day of his life pass without praying to God for himself, and for all christians, as that holy prayer directs we should do? That we pray for pardon, for grace, for God's protection and blessing upon ourselves, upon our neighbours, upon our children, upon our families, and upon our labours?

Will it not be required of every christian, that he has given God thanks *daily,* for the blessings he has daily received from His bounty; for the means of grace; for the dangers he has escaped, whether ghostly or bodily; for success in his labours, and for the continuance of his life?

Lastly; will it not be required of every christian, who pretends to love God, that he has prayed daily, that God may be honoured and glorified by the good lives of christians; that God would set up His kingdom in all the world, and in all our hearts; that we may close with the will of God whenever it is made known to us?

This, we must say again, will be required of the most unlearned christian, who can but say the Lord's Prayer, (and who will, for very shame, say that he cannot?) it will be required of him, that he has devoutly, and upon all occasions, begged of God to hear him according to the full importance and meaning of that divine Prayer. And sad will be the account of every christian, who has not done so to the best of his understanding and power.

To proceed: God has appointed *certain ordinances,* as most

sure means of conveying *pardon* to sinners, *grace* to such as sincerely desire it, and *salvation* to all who devoutly close with them. These ordinances God has put into the hands of His ministers, to be dispensed to all such as shall be religiously disposed to receive them. Very much, therefore, will be required of every man, who shall slight or neglect such means of salvation, which are designed by God to admit us into, and to keep us in His favour.

By *baptism* we are admitted into the Church of Christ; and by that sacrament we have a right to all the blessings and promises of the Gospel. And when, through infirmity, through temptation, or for want of due care, we have broken the covenant of our God, He has in great mercy appointed another sacrament, whereby we may be restored to His favour upon our true repentance.

What will any christian have to say for himself at the great day, who, having been dedicated to *God* in baptism, has taken no care to live as became the holy profession he then made of continuing Christ's faithful servant unto his life's end?

What will those parents have to answer for, who have taken no care to have their children instructed in the faith and fear of God; who have taken more care of their bodies than of their souls; and by doing so, have exposed both their souls and bodies to eternal destruction?

And can we imagine, that it will not be required of all persons that are come to years of discretion, and see the sin and the dangers they are exposed to, if they did not take upon themselves the covenant made for them in baptism, and thereby secure a greater portion of the Spirit of God, to enable them to encounter the difficulties they had to struggle with?

And such will still have more to answer for, if, after they have taken upon themselves their baptismal vows, they fall into a careless or a wicked way of living.

Jesus Christ has given unto christians one of the greatest pledges of His love, *in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper;* in order to keep up the remembrance of His death, *by which alone we obtain remission of our sins.* Luke 22. 19.

Will the most unlearned christian say, that he cannot

SERM. XLI.

understand so plain an ordinance? Will the most employed say, that he has not time to observe so short a service? Will any man say, that he can be a true christian without obeying so positive a command?

What then will be required of those christians who have all their life long turned their back on the Lord's table; of those who go to the Lord's table without a full purpose of forsaking those sins which cost Jesus Christ His life; or of those who have purposed to lead a new, that is, a Christian life, and have taken the sacrament upon it, and yet have still returned unto a careless or a sinful way of living? God will most certainly require it of every one who has done so, and has not repented and amended before he is called to judgment.

In short, all these will be without excuse: such as do not desire to know their duty; such as have taken no pains to understand the will of God, what will please and what will displease Him; such as never beg of God to enlighten their minds with saving truth; and especially all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness, that is, who do not live up to that measure of light and strength which God has given them.

For this is a law of the Gospel given by Jesus Christ Himself: "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which He hath;" that is, whoever hath received and improved any talent which God has given him, God will give him more; and He will take away from those that have not made a good use of His gifts even what He had given them.

[Matt. 13. 12.]

And this, God knows, is too often verified: and we see every day people who have been dedicated to God, been made partakers of His Holy Spirit, have been taught their duty, and have solemnly vowed to perform it; yet for want of care, and neglecting to improve these gifts of God, are become *wicked, dissolute, profane, hardened in sin, ignorant, fearless,* and *reprobate.*

Do not we know, that we are, every soul of us, of the same race, and make, and corrupt nature, with those unhappy people, whom we see and confess to be in the way of eternal

ruin? And will it not be required of us, that we keep a strict *watch* over ourselves, lest we also fall into the snare and temptation of the devil?

Do not we see men ruining themselves, souls and bodies, because they will not *deny* themselves the desires of their own hearts? And does not every body see, and confess, that the want of *thought* and *consideration* is the ruin of infinite souls?

Will it not, therefore, be required of every body who knows these things, if they have not kept a watch over themselves, if they have not denied themselves, if they have not considered and laid to heart the things that belonged to their peace?

And when we are most serious and thoughtful, let every soul of us consider these few, but most important questions: how much will be required of those christians, who have the Holy Scriptures in their hands, and do not profit by them; who have the way of salvation plainly shewed them, and do not value it; who know that God is to be *feared* above all things, and yet make no scruple to do every thing that they know will displease and provoke Him; who are instructed in the will of God, and regard it as nothing; who are invited to ask, and they shall receive, and yet think it not worth their while; or else ask such things as are not worthy of God to give, or safe for themselves to receive?

Let us ask again, what will be required of such as call themselves christians, and cannot by their lives be known from heathens; who come before God without reverence, blaspheme His name without scruple, pay no regard to what peculiarly belongs to Him; who treat their neighbour with that *contempt*, or *hatred*, or *injustice*, or *uncharitableness*, or *wrong*, as if they never did hope to meet him in heaven; and (which is the saddest delusion of all) who themselves hope to go to heaven, without any of those qualifications which God requires of all such as shall be admitted into that holy, that happy place? What will be required of such christians? Our Saviour has given the answer in these dreadful words: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such christians." [Matt. 10. 15.]

Good christians, I have insisted upon these things, that I

SERM. XLI.

may raise in my own, and in all your hearts, a true value for the blessings which we have received from God; as also, a just concern for the account we must give, and the great hazard we run, if we shall, any of us, be so unhappy as to despise or abuse these mercies.

You have seen plainly what will be required of every soul of us, when we come before the tribunal of God; that in receiving the Gospel, we have received *very much*, and that very much will be required of us. We have received the knowledge of *God*, and of ourselves, and our duty to both. To awaken in us a concern for our souls, we have received from God an account of what must come hereafter; how the souls of men are disposed of when they die, according as their works have been in the body, whether good or bad.

You have seen the delusion of those who flatter themselves that they have little to account for, having received little from God.

Whatever heathens may say for themselves, *no christian* can with truth say, that he has received little. Our Lord's answer, which He gave to the Jews, will most surely be given to every christian who shall plead *that* for himself: "If I had not come and spoken unto you, you had not had sin; but now you have no cloke (no excuse) for your sin." No, not the meanest christian: for the meanest christian, the most unlearned, knows when he does amiss; when he does what will displease God; and when his conscience does not accuse him.

John 15. 22.

And let it not be wondered at, that christians, who know what sin is, and what will be the end of it, do yet, in defiance of hell and damnation, go on in their sin, and live and die under the displeasure of God, Who can destroy both body and soul in hell. The Apostle has given us the true reason of this, because, "when men know God, and glorify Him not as God, God will give them up at last to a reprobate mind;" that is, to a mind void of judgment.

[Rom. 1. 21, 28.]

To conclude: if we would lead a life worthy of the religion we profess, and of the hopes we have of being happy when we die, we must ever and anon remember the account we are to give for the talents we have received. We must remember it, so as upon all occasions to put it in practice; and we shall

soon see the good effects of the practical belief of a judgment to come.

For example. Let us often say to ourselves, God has given me life and health, that I may do good in my generation, and that, by doing so, I may become worthy of a better life hereafter: what then will become of me, if I spend this life in idleness, in luxury, in wickedness; if I shorten this life by intemperance; or spend it in sinful pleasures?

God has given me children; if I take no care to give them a Christian education, I shall be answerable for their damnation.

I have a plentiful estate, and more than enough for my own necessities; others are in want, and I regard it not: I shall certainly answer for this another day.

I am selling my inheritance, or spending that in rioting and drunkenness, which belongs to my wife and children. Do I believe there is a God, and that He will not require it of me?

I have more knowledge, and know my duty better, than my neighbours; why then, I have more reason to fear, because more will be required of me. He that has given me power over others, will make me feel His power over me, if I abuse the authority with which He has intrusted me.

I have time to spare, which others have not. What then? Have I a right to squander it in idleness and pleasures? Can I persuade myself that life and time were given me for that end?

Would christians reason after some such way as this, concerning the judgment to come, and what will then be required of them, it would mightily change their lives, and the face of religion in the world.

But it must be Thy grace, O God, which must make this change, and enable us to improve all the talents which we have received.

Let us not then, good christians, defer one moment to ask this grace of God, every one for himself, and for all christian people. And that we may do it more earnestly, let us remember, that now is the time in which to prepare for the account we are to give, and to choose where and what we are to be for ever.

SERM. XLI.

May God fix these thoughts in all our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour of His name, and the salvation of our souls, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XLII.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGES OF RIGHTLY CONSIDERING THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

PSALM XC. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

See Job 14. 5—15; Ps. 90. 9; 2 Cor. 6. 2; Col. 4. 5; James 4.14; 1 Pet. 1. 17.

THE plain meaning of these words *is this:* Teach us, O God, so effectually to consider how short our time is; how it passes away never to be recalled; and how much depends upon our making a good use of the time God is pleased to allow us; that we may live like people who have their senses about them, who consider what may come hereafter; that we may not squander away that time in vanity, which is designed to fit us for a blessed eternity; and that we may not be surprised by death, but be prepared (as wise men ought to be) for that which will come, whether they think of it or not.

The value of our time, the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, are things proper at any time to be recommended to people's serious consideration; but it would be unpardonable carelessness to let one year after another pass, without ever thinking of that which may be the last, without numbering the many years we have lived in comparison of the few which perhaps we have to live.

We have, within a few hours, seen the end of one year more; *and God grant that the sins of this year may never rise*

SERM. XLII.

up in judgment against us. We are just entering upon the very beginning of another year, *and God only knows which of us here present shall see the end of it:* but this we know, and are sure of; that either before the end of this year, or before many years are at an end, we, and all men now living, shall be in another world; and in an endless state either of happiness or misery.

Whether it does not much concern us to think of that world, and to make some preparations for it, I must leave you to judge, after I have laid before you a few things to be seriously thought of. Such are these following:

First; that our days are few. But that,

Secondly; they are sufficient, if we are wise enough to make use of them.

Thirdly; that the end of them is unknown to us, and uncertain.

And *lastly,* that it is our wisdom to consider this; for that our eternal welfare depends upon it.

The consideration of these particulars may be of great use to us all.

To those who are truly concerned for the happiness of another life, it will be matter of great comfort to consider, that short as their time is, yet, by the favour of God, it is long enough to fit them for everlasting happiness.

To those who have spent their time well, it will be great satisfaction to look back upon the years that are past, and to see that they have not quite misspent a life, which at best is but short.

And lastly, to those who have but seldom thought of these matters, it may be of use *to be put in mind,* that here is one year more of a short life passed over their heads; that the next for ought they know may be their last; and that it will be much for their advantage to begin a *new year* and a *new life* together.

To come therefore to the matter before us.

I. Let us consider *that our days are few, and therefore our time is precious.*

And is not this acknowledged by us all, and complained of as a great misfortune; that our lives are short; that we are no sooner come into the world, and to years of discretion,

but we are immediately called upon to prepare to go out of it; and that whether we are prepared or not, leave it we must, either with or against our wills? Yes; all this is acknowledged, and there would be no need of speaking of the shortness of our lives, but that *the greatest part of us* live as if we did not really believe what we so frequently acknowledge and complain of.

It would not become one (who himself has too many) to expose the infirmities of mankind; but it is necessary that we should not deceive ourselves, while we pretend to set a value upon that which in truth we do not regard.

If a man is very much concerned to prolong his life; if he spares no money, neglects no advice, consults his friends and physicians, and all this to add a few days to the number of his years; all this would look as if we did really value our time, and think it so short, that all cost and pains are too little that are bestowed upon prolonging it to its utmost period.

But do men indeed count their time precious? That will best be seen by considering how they use it while they have it: for if a man who takes great care of himself in the time of sickness, as soon as he recovers, shall run into new disorders; if a man, while he is under the apprehensions of death, laments the shortness of his days, as having but a few to spend to any good purposes; if such a person, when he is out of such fears and danger, shall live at all adventures, and return again to his follies, it is a sign that he values a long life, not for any wise purposes, but to spend it upon his lusts.

Thus the worldling and covetous man complains of the shortness of life, because he has but a few years to get a great estate in. The drunkard thinks that time passes away, and that death is hastening on to interrupt his pleasures. And even those that are now careless, and have so much time upon their hands that they do not know how to spend it, will one day think it very short, when they come to consider how little use they may have of it.

And now you see the reason why men call time precious, and think life very short: not that they would make good use of it, were it ten times as long; but that they might have

SERM. XLII.

more time,—one to idle and saunter away his life in vanity and trifles; another to leave a greater estate than a blessing to his posterity; another would have more time, that he may spend it upon his lusts. Some wish a long life, that they may enjoy the estates their ancestors have left them; others that they may spend them, and leave none to their posterity. Those that are in easy circumstances think life too short, and desire to live longer, that they may have all the good that this world can afford; and those that are poor and in want, would live longer to see an end of their miseries, and a change for the better.

In short, all agree in this,—that our days are few, and our time precious; and but too few consider the true end of life, or resolve to make the best use of so precious a thing.

If our days were so many that we could not number them, a man would have some excuse, though he should fling some of them away upon vanity and nothing; but when he that can but count threescore and ten, or fourscore, can number the years of the longest life, it should not seem to be great wisdom to lose much of our time without considering what may come hereafter.

If our days are but a span long, we may better see to the end of them; and it is unpardonable not to consider our latter end, when we are complaining of it, as coming too fast upon us.

It was, perhaps, the long lives of those before the flood that made them so wicked as to deserve to be destroyed by a general deluge. They reckoned upon four or five hundred years at least, and death at such a distance did not affect them with what must follow: they kept far from them the evil day, till at last they forgot that such a time was ever to come, and this made them secure and wicked beyond example. But for *us* to know and confess that our days are few, and that we are, within a very short space of time, to leave this world, and to give an account of what we have done here, and yet to have no more concern upon our spirits than if we were never to die, is somewhat unaccountable: and if we complain of the shortness of our lives, and yet make no better use of them, we shall complain without pity, and perish without relief.

After all, our time is truly short: we ought to know this, and to consider it seriously, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom; that we may in this our day know the things that belong unto our peace, lest they be for ever after hid from us.

Even they that are *young* ought to know this, for the days will come in which they will have a nearer sight of death.

They that are *in health* ought not to forget it, for ere long sickness and death will put them in mind of the folly of not thinking of them sooner.

But if the young and the healthful have reason to reflect upon the shortness of life, much more reason have *they* to do so, with concern and thoughtfulness, who have spent much of their time in sin and folly, who are already in years, and have done nothing towards their errand into the world.

Those who are of a weak constitution ought to consider this in earnest; and they that are *old,* should ever have it in their thoughts.

They that have done little good ought to think the time short in which they are to make amends for their negligence; and they that have done much wrong may well fear the time short in which they may make restitution for the injury they have done.

In short, the days of our age, by the just appointment of God, are reduced to a narrow compass; but here is our comfort:

II. *We have time sufficient for all the purposes of salvation, if we are wise enough to make good use of it:* and this takes away all just occasion of complaint.

We may want time for our pleasures: we may want time for our vices: but we shall not want time to work out our salvation, provided we spend not our time for that which will not profit us. For the same just God, Who has made our age as it were a span long, has made our duty possible to be performed within that short space: and even where we want time to do what His mercy is pleased to allow of, there His goodness often accepts of the will for the deed.

Our happiness in the next world is not to be measured by the time we spend in this. Many go to heaven out of the arms of the mother; many are delivered out of the snares of

SERM. XLII.

a sinful world, even as soon as they are come into the danger; many are taken away in the midst of their days, to practise the graces in heaven which they had begun on earth; and it may be, they are the fewest in number who leave this world in a good old age to take possession of the blessings of the next life.

In short, the ways of God are unsearchable, and the reasons of His providence past finding out. This only we know,—that our *happiness* is owing to His mere mercy in His Son Jesus Christ, which accepts of our obedience; and where that is wanting, of our sincere repentance. If He prolongs our days, it is because He expects we should make use of our time to His honour and our own greater good; if He takes us away in the beginning of our days, it is because He has allowed us time sufficient for the work appointed us, that we may more devoutly adore the greatness of that mercy, which rewards His creatures according to His own great goodness, not according to their deservings.

Thus all ages of men taste the goodness of the Lord; all ages are capable of His mercy; and if there are many who come short of eternal happiness, it is not for want of time to do their duty, but for want of a will to perform it: either they are in love with wickedness, and will not leave it for the hopes of heaven; or they purpose to repent some time or other, and continue thus to purpose, and repent not, till death calls them unawares to judgment; or they have deceived themselves, and have depended upon such righteousness as God will not accept of.

For these, and such reasons as these, men may be shut out of the kingdom of heaven; but not for want of time sufficient in which to work out their salvation.

Our blessed Saviour has discovered to us a new and living way by which we may be reconciled unto God, and prepared for heaven. It is *He* Who has made known to us,—that there is joy in heaven for repenting sinners; that charity will cover a multitude of sins; that hearty repentance, and true faith, are sometimes accepted instead of a long obedience; that a sinful prodigal, returning to his duty, has been received into favour, and treated as one who had never offended.

Now these are comfortable truths indeed; truths they are

that may be depended upon: and they are written for our admonition, that men may at all times be encouraged to come unto God by Jesus Christ; "that all who are weary and heavy laden," with the burden of their sins, may know where to find rest; and lastly, that none may perish but by their own wilful negligence: for, notwithstanding the goodness of God in accepting of our repentance, many there are that perish: amongst these, the greatest number, it is probable, are of such as put off their repentance from time to time, till at last they are prevented by death from bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. [Matt. 11. 28.]

This is, no doubt of it, the ruin of many souls. To prevent which mischief, there is another circumstance of our life fit to be considered; namely,

III. *That the end of our days is unknown to us, and uncertain.*

It is true, our lives are in God's hands; nothing can befal us without His permission. But since the time when He will call us out of the world is altogether, as to us, uncertain; it is highly reasonable we should be prepared for God's good time, which, though it may not perhaps be the best for us, if we are not prepared for heaven, yet it will ever be the fittest to manifest the glory of God, and His justice upon those who are deaf to all the methods of His mercy.

He has not made known to us the day of our death, that we, not knowing when He will call for us, may be ever prepared for His coming; that we may, all our life long, live like men who know and believe that there is another world after this; that this life is only in order to fit us for a much better; and that if we neglect the opportunity of making our peace with God while we are here, or defer the doing so till we are surprised by sickness and death, we do lose the only opportunity of securing our eternal welfare, and consequently are undone for ever.

In short, we know not when we shall die, whether this year or the next; but this we know, and ought to think seriously of it, that the only way to make the uncertainty of our life comfortable to us is this: to consider that the year we are entering upon may be the last we have to live in this world; and since it may be so, to resolve, by God's grace, so to

SERM. XLII.

husband this short time, as that we may ourselves have comfortable thoughts of another life, and that those who are left behind may not have reason to grieve as men without hope.

To make this consideration of more use to us, pray let us remember, that all the time of our lives which is already past, and not spent in doing our duty, is utterly lost to us. And this must needs be an astonishing thought to a man who has spent the greatest part of his life in vanity. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," is a most wholesome admonition; for he that spends his youth in idleness or vice, has no more younger years to spend in virtue and piety. He that has never thought of the good of his soul, till a few days before he comes to die, has but a few days in which to make his salvation sure.

[Eccles. 12. 1.]

We, whose duty it is to visit men in their last hours, can say, by experience, under what agonies men labour, who have not thought of these things until they have been ready to give up their accounts.

Well then; one of these two conditions every one of us will be in when we come to die (unless we die suddenly): we shall either bewail our misspent days, and with great sorrow wish we had never been born; or we shall with comfort look back upon the time we have lived in the fear of God, and in obedience to His laws. Pray then let us consider, which of these conditions is fittest to be chosen by people that are in their perfect minds and senses: and, because every day, every year, that we misspend, is for ever lost to us, let us not choose to spend one year after another in doing nothing of that business for which we had our lives given and continued to us. Especially since in the last place,

IV. *Our eternal welfare depends upon this uncertain life.* And this is a thought that should make one very serious indeed.

If a man has made a foolish bargain, time and good husbandry, advice of friends, or experience, may set all straight again, and the injury may be repaired. If a man has through ill husbandry spent a great estate, he has this comfort at least, that he shall some time be freed from the shame and sense of his misfortunes: but what amends can be made, what argu-

ments can be used, to comfort a man who has lived a careless, useless life, and is now going into eternity?

A few of those days which are past would be precious; but time is not to be purchased when we come to die; and for that reason it ought not to be squandered away and neglected while we have it continued to us.

Those that let one day after another pass over their heads without thinking what ill they have done, and what good they have to do, may have this small comfort, that to lose a few days out of the number of their life, is not very material. Let it be so: but sure it is very material to lose one year after another, without thinking seriously of our errand into the world, without providing for a better world. And it is wisdom not to hazard our souls upon such uncertainties as are the number of our days and years, and the time of our stay here.

Thus you see what we pray for, when we beg of God to give us grace *to number our days.* It is, that we may soberly consider the shortness of our time, the uncertainty of our latter end, and that the greatest good or evil that can possibly befal us depends upon our making good or bad use of the present opportunity; and that, considering these things, we may apply our hearts unto wisdom; that we may fear God, *which is the beginning of wisdom;* that we may observe His laws, *which are the ways of wisdom;* and that we may live to His glory and our own salvation, *which is the perfection of wisdom.*

This is that true wisdom which the Spirit of God recommends so much to us as the only thing which can make our years happy, and without which we cannot be happy, though we should succeed in all our undertakings besides.

Blessed be God, that we that are here present have seen the end of this year, and are come even to the beginning of another; that we have not been cut off in the midst of our days; and especially, that we have not been surprised by death in the midst of our sins and unthoughtfulness.

Blessed be God, that we are yet of the number of those who have time and space for repentance and good works. The gracious God grant that we may value our days as we ought to do; and that, if we live to the end of the approach-

SERM. XLII.

ing year, we may not have reason to repent that we have lived so much longer, or apprehend the anger of God, for what we shall have done.

To this end let us consider, that the shortest life, by the grace of God, is long enough to gain heaven; and that the longest life is but a curse, when we make use of it only to increase the number of our iniquities; that though every one present should live to the end of another year, to the end of many years, yet still we are accountable for them; and that it is no great blessing, whatever we think of it, to live many years, only to be more miserable at the last.

Let us, therefore, live like people that are truly convinced and persuaded of the truth of these things, that we may not be surprised in the midst of our sins. And these considerations, as serious as they are, will be so far from damping the pleasures of this season, that they will make our joys more grateful, and more lasting.

And in the doing of this great work, the good God send us a happy New Year! Prosper Thou, O God, the work of our hands upon us: O prosper Thou our handy-work.

And God grant, that after the few days and years we have to live in this world, we may leave it for a better; where we may praise Thee to all eternity, for the time Thou hast afforded us here, in which to work out our salvation, and for all the favours Thou hast in mercy vouchsafed unto us.

SERMON XLIII.

THE GREAT DANGER OF NOT KNOWING THE DAY OF VISITATION.

LUKE xix. 41—44.

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it; saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

See Ps. 39. 4; 90. 12; Mark 13. 33; Luke 21. 34; 1 Pet. 2. 12.

I MUST tell you, in the first place, that all these things came to pass exactly as our Lord foretold, within less than forty years after His death.

The Romans besieged the city of Jerusalem so close that not a man could escape; and after the most dreadful siege that ever was heard of, they took it, destroying all before them, and not leaving one stone upon another of one of the finest cities and temples in the world.

Our Blessed Lord could not forbear weeping, because He foresaw that this would certainly come to pass, and because He saw that *that* people would not be persuaded, by any thing that He could say or do, to prevent it by a timely repentance. He knew this was *their day* of grace, and He saw they despised it, and that it would end in their destruction. And this made our compassionate Saviour bewail, with tears,

SERM. XLIII.

the miseries they were bringing upon themselves, and upon their posterity.

And this should teach all christians how to behave themselves on such occasions; namely, not to be pleased with and laugh at the sins of others, as people are but too apt to do, but rather to pity and bewail the blindness of sinners, who do not know the judgments they are preparing for themselves; and to beg of God to open their eyes, that they may see their error, and sad condition, before the day of grace is at an end.

And, God knows, we have great reason thus to mourn, whether we consider the general state of Christianity, or the wicked lives of particular christians. For not to mention the *heresies*, the *divisions*, the *idolatry*, that is to be met with in many Christian Churches; not to mention the sins of *whoredom, adultery, injustice, drunkenness*, and such like, which every body knows will shut men out of heaven; we need only consider the lives of very many christians, who fear no danger, and yet live like heathens; we need only consider this, in order to excite our grief, and fetch tears from our eyes.

To see people, for instance, who profess to have here no abiding-place, yet setting up their rest upon earth, as if they were sure, as if they desired, never to leave it; to see christians, who are bound by their profession to love one another, rejoicing and taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of each other; to hear people beg of God to forgive them *their* trespasses, as *they* are ready to forgive others, and at the same time resolving not to forgive the least offence against themselves without full satisfaction; to see the *rich* oppressing the *poor*, and the *poor* envying the *rich*, as if the *rich* were not accountable to God, nor the *poor* expected any amends in the next world for what they want in this; to see *parents* educating their children after such a manner as if they intended their eternal ruin; teaching them to love the world, instead of renouncing it; gratifying them in every thing that is vain and sinful, and suffering them to content themselves with a bare outward form of religion, without knowing any thing of its power, or of that "holiness without which no man must see the Lord;" to see *pastors* as little concerned for the flocks committed to their charge, as if, in truth, they were so many

[Heb. 12. 14.]

beasts whose souls would die with their bodies, and for which they were never to give an account; in one word, to see the greatest part of christians live without *faith*, without *hope*, without *charity*, without *fear*; that is, without any true religion; to see them living at this rate, without apprehending any manner of danger, neglecting the *day of grace* which God has afforded them for their salvation, and never considering, *that the night cometh when no man can work*: can any christian see and consider all this, and where it must end, and not be moved with sorrow and compassion, as our Lord was, for the eternal miseries which unthoughtful christians are bringing upon themselves? Can they forbear to mourn in secret, and beg of God to pity and cure these disorders, and the blindness of sinners, who do not see the danger of neglecting the *time of visitation*, and *the day of grace?* [John 9. 4.]

It was this that moved our Lord's compassion for Jerusalem, *because she knew not the time of her visitation*, and because that was the occasion of her ruin. She *knew not*; that is, she *would not* know it. She would not see the sin that occasioned it; she would not believe the Prophets that foretold it; she would not receive the Son of God, who came to warn her of her approaching ruin, and who would, no doubt of it, have delivered her from it, would she have improved the means of salvation so mercifully afforded her: for it was as easy for God to have saved that whole nation from destruction, as He did those few that believed, whom He delivered as by a miracle from that desolation which soon after followed.

Now, these things, good christians, were written for our example, *that we may see the danger of not knowing the day of visitation.*

For that there *is* an appointed time, in which God offers grace to sinners, and an opportunity of working out their salvation; and that when *this* is neglected and past, sinners have nothing to expect but judgment without mercy; that *this is* so, is plain from this, and from many other instances, and parts of holy Scripture:

"To-day, (saith the Psalmist,) to-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts:" Ps. 95. 7, 8.

"Behold now (saith the Apostle) is the accepted time, now 2 Cor. 6. 2.

SERM. XLIII.

is the day of salvation." And, "Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day;" that is, while the time of trial lasteth.

Heb. 3. 13.

"Ah," saith our Lord; that is, happy had it been for thee, "if thou hadst known, even thou, in this day" (of visitation), "the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes;" that is, through thine own infidelity, thou hast provoked God to leave thee to thine own blindness, so that thou canst not see the *day of thy visitation*.

You see, brethren, how matters stand with us. We are all gone astray from God; He has appointed us *a time* in which to return to Him; if we lose *this time*, we are most certainly undone. This is not what God desires, for He is not willing that any should perish; He therefore calls upon us to return to our duty, *He speaks to us once, yea twice, though we perceive it not*. He speaks to us by His *Word* and by His *ministers;* He speaks to us by His *mercies*, and by His *judgments;* He lays us upon the bed of sickness; He brings troubles upon us; He takes from us our *children*, and our *goods;* He suffers us to be *wronged*, and *persecuted*, and the like; not that He takes any pleasure in the miseries of His creatures, but as Elihu, in the book of Job, observes, "All these things worketh God oftentimes with man," for this end, "to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of the living;" that is, to open his eyes that he may see the *time of his visitation;* and that he may lay hold of it, and prevent the miseries of the next world, to which these are not to be compared.

Job 33. 14.

[Job 33. 29, 30.]

Thus the author of the book of Wisdom, speaking of the Canaanites, tells us how God spared them as men *capable of knowing His meaning;* not that He was unable to have destroyed them at once with cruel beasts, or even with the rough sword, but that executing His judgments by little and little, He gave them place for repentance.

Wisd. 12. 8, &c.

And thus He deals with all mankind; and all that perish, perish through their own fault and wilful blindness; they will not *see* the opportunities which God affords them of working out their salvation, till very often it is too late to make use of them.

But then, this is purely our own fault. God forbid that

we should imagine that He speaks so as not to be understood by *all* that are *disposed* to hear Him. I will endeavour, therefore, to make you sensible how we come to be so *blind* as not to see the seasons in which God visits us.

And first; we are apt to call every thing that befals us *mere chance;* whereas nothing happens to men, but by the order or permission of God; and every thing (if we could be persuaded to consider and see it) is designed for our good; either to awaken us when we grow careless, or to instruct us when we know not our duty, or to punish us in this life, that we may not be punished in the next. We should be blinder than the very Jews and Heathens, if we should not see and confess this.

"As I have done, so God has requited me," saith a prince, when the conqueror cut off his thumbs and great toes. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," said the sons of Jacob, when God brought them into distress, "in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and we would not hear him." They did not say, this trouble which we are all fallen into came by *chance;* nor did they say it was their *lot*, and their *destiny*, and not to be avoided; but they owned the hand of God in it, *His justice*, and *His mercy*, in punishing them *here*, rather than *hereafter*, and in opening *their eyes*, though it were by sharp medicines. [Judg. 1. 7; Gen. 42. 21.]

So just is that observation of the Wise Man, "Thou chastenest them by little and little that offend, and warnest them by putting them in remembrance wherein they have offended, that leaving their wickedness they may believe in Thee, O Lord." Wisd. 12. 2.

But there is another cause of men's blindness, and which makes them forget their errand in this world, and *the day of grace:* and this is, *a constant hurry of business, and success in it.*

It is utterly impossible to *love God*, or to desire to enjoy Him, while we love the world with all our hearts. This is the true reason why so many neglect eternity, and never think of providing for it, till just as they are leaving the world. They are too much distracted to hear their compassionate Saviour asking them this question, "What will it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" [Mark 8. 36.]

SERM. XLIII.

But if *business* is apt to blind us, much more will *success* in it. David confesseth this, and God's mercy in opening his eyes: "In my prosperity, I said I shall never be removed. Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." [Ps. 30. 6, 7.]

But that which above all things hinders our conversion, and blinds our eyes most effectually, is, *the want of humility*. It was *this* that hardened the Jews; they were *too wise* to be taught, even by the Son of God; they were *too righteous* to need repentance; they were too exact in lesser matters, to mind the great concerns of the law; in one word, they took some care of their outward actions and profession, but had little or no concern for the inward graces of the Spirit.

And, O God! is not this the case of too many christians, who depend upon being in covenant with God, and called by the name of christians, and, on that account only, secure from destruction? And yet this was the very case of the Jews, whose unhappy condition and blindness Jesus Christ laments with tears. They had Abraham for their father; they had the *covenant*, and the *law*, and the *promises*, and the *temple*, and the *sacrifices*; and what have we more? And yet for want of *humility*, and making a right use of all these mighty advantages, they became the most abandoned of all people. [Rom. 9. 4.]

And ought it not to humble us to consider how little we are better than they, with all the advantages we are apt to boast of? We that know we are made for the everlasting possession of the heavenly Canaan, and yet never prepare for it with seriousness! We that are made for the fellowship of angels, and yet can be content with the pleasures of beasts! We that have a time appointed us by God, in which to work out our salvation, with an assurance, that "when the night cometh no man can work;" and yet defer this mighty concern to the evening of our day! We that believe an everlasting life of happiness or misery after death, and yet never seriously consider which of the two may be our own portion! We that confess we are sinners, and yet live as if we had never offended God, and stand in no need of His pardon! We that are in danger every moment to be snatched away, and are sure, if we die in our sins unrepented of, to be made the [John 9. 4.]

scorn of devils, and yet to be as unconcerned as if the command of life were in our own hands!

Gracious God! that these considerations might awaken in us a deep sense of our unhappy state! that weighing the *shortness* and *uncertainty* of our time, the great work we have to do, the necessity of making our peace with God, the comfort of living to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," [Matt. 3.8.] and the danger of dying under Thy displeasure, our hearts may be filled with godly fear; and that we may see, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, lest they be for ever hid from our eyes.

But I would not, good christians, only raise your fears and your passions, without instructing you how to turn them to good purposes. Our Lord Himself has told us what to do when our hearts are filled with fears of what may become of us hereafter: "Watch and pray," saith He, "that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things. For ye know [Mark 13. 33; Luke 21. 34.] not when your Lord cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. Take heed, therefore, lest your hearts be overcome with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this world, and that day overtake you unawares."

Why now, christians, this is our case; *this is our day of salvation.* I, and every one of you that now hear me, have it in our own power, by the grace of God, to be for ever happy. *This is our appointed time,* which would not be continued to us, but that God waits to be gracious. That we may not lose this opportunity, our first and great duty is to *watch* and *pray;* to *watch* against *sin,* and to *pray* for *grace;* always remembering, that if we lead a *careless, useless, thoughtless* life, our sentence is already passed, with that of the slothful servant, who was commanded to watch, and did not: "Bind [Matt. 22. 13.] him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness."

But how must we watch? Why, we must endeavour to have the *shortness and uncertainty of our life ever in our thoughts;* the good effects of which will be these:

We shall make good use of our present time, *for who knows how short it may be?* We shall take every opportunity of doing good, *for who knows whether ever we may have another?* We shall be just in all our dealings, *for who would hazard his soul*

SERM. XLIII.

for what he must in a very short time leave behind him? We shall be moderate in our cares for the riches and conveni-

[Mark 8. 36.] encies of this life, *for what would it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* We shall be *sober* and *temperate,* lest that day should overtake us, as it has done many, when we have not our thoughts and senses about us. We shall be *patient* under all the afflictions with which God shall think fit to exercise us, seeing plainly that these *cannot* last long. We shall be charitable and merciful according to

[1 Tim. 6. 19.] our power, as knowing assuredly that we are *laying up for ourselves a good foundation for the time to come.*

We shall *readily forgive* all that have offended or injured us; for why should we be enemies here, when in a very little time we hope to meet in Paradise, and be good friends *there* for ever?

In short, we shall always be *serious,* for so the thoughts of death will be apt to make us; always *devout,* for who can think of another life, and not passionately desire and pray that his portion may be with the blessed? And by this means we shall make our lives *easy,* and our deaths *happy.*

But is all this care and watchfulness necessary for every one that hopes to be happy when he dies? Most certainly so.

[Mark 13. 37.] "What I say unto you," (saith our Lord,) "I say unto all, *Watch.*" And indeed, it cannot be otherwise. For how can we hope to go to the place of just men made perfect, but by following their steps; by becoming, in some measure, perfect as they were?

My meaning and the truth is this: before we leave this world, as ever we hope to go to a better, *our nature must be*

Eph. 4. 24. *changed;* we must put on, as the Apostle speaks, *the new man;* that is, we must endeavour by the grace of God to be restored to that integrity in which man was at first created, and which was lost at the Fall, by which we are become weak, sinful creatures. Our business in the world is to be restored to this condition again, that we may be fit for the company of angels, and the souls of just men made perfect.

But how must this be done? Why, first, by forsaking every evil way; then, by watching, and standing against all temptations to sin, which we are sure every day to meet with; by denying our own desires, which would lead us to

dishonour God; and, because we have nothing in ourselves to trust unto, by earnestly and daily begging of God to give us new *hearts*, new *desires*, and greater *strength*, and better *resolutions*, than we have by nature; by endeavouring every day more than other, to wean our affections from the things of this world; by thinking often of the *shortness* of this life, and of the *eternity* of the next, of the joys of heaven, and of the pains of hell. Lastly; by exercising ourselves in acts of *piety* and *charity*, that we may thereby recommend ourselves to God for greater degrees of grace here, and for a favourable sentence at the day of judgment.

So that you see, good christians, we have no reason to *despair:* while we are alive, we have reason to hope that God has not forsaken us for ever. But then let us, like men awake and in their senses, resolve to *redeem the time* we have lost, and which was granted to us for working out our salvation; remembering, that when once time is lost, it can never be recovered, if we had the world to give for it. And let us not flatter our hearts with thinking, that because the day of judgment may be a great way off, that therefore we are a great way from danger; for it is undoubtedly true and plain from the sacred Scriptures, that as soon as ever we die, the souls of good men are *by the angels* carried into Paradise, a place of peace, rest, and happiness; for so was the soul of Lazarus, and so was that of the penitent thief: on the other hand, the souls of wicked men are carried to a place of misery, as was that of the rich man: both the one and the other to be kept either in *peace*, or in *misery*, unto the judgment of the great day.

Well then, what I have hitherto said comes to this: this short life is our *appointed day*, in which to work out our salvation; "the night"—that is, death—"cometh, when no man can work." If death overtake us before we have prepared ourselves for it, we are for ever undone. The time of our death is hid from us, that we may be always thinking of it, always preparing for it. That we may not forget the *only thing* for which we came into the world, God has hitherto spared us, and puts us in mind of our *latter end* by a thousand instances. Some are every day going out of the world, of all ages and conditions, by all manner of ways, by sudden and

[John 9. 4.]

SERM. XLIII.

untimely deaths; some young; some in their full age and strength; and much the fewest in a good old age. Nay, every day that we come to the house of God, we tread upon the *graves* of those that have already received their doom, whose souls are all confined to their proper places of happiness or misery. And will not this affect our hearts? I am sure it ought, and make us seriously think within ourselves, that very, very soon, this *must* be the case of every one of us here present.

Consider what it was that made our Lord to weep over Jerusalem; why, the temporal calamities He saw the stubborn Jews were bringing upon their own heads: He saw how their city would be laid in ashes, how they themselves would be starved with famine, how that at last they would all be murdered, or sold for slaves. But what is all this, to the misery of being for ever separated from God; of having our portion with evil spirits, which are kept in chains and darkness unto the judgment of the great day; and who at that day must hear these dreadful words, "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," &c.

[Matt. 25. 41.]

Why now, my brethren, the same Spirit which foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, and which came exactly to pass; the same mouth which forewarned them, has also given us warning of what will befal us when we die, if we are not renewed in the spirit of our mind while we live: it is therefore necessary, very necessary, that these truths should be often sounded in our ears; forasmuch as a spirit of slumber has seized upon the world, and men live as if they were never to die, or as if after death they were to have no being. It was just so with the Jews before their final destruction. And do not think, my brethren, that these things are nothing to us; the frequent *admonitions* they had, their *blindness*, their *obstinacy*, their *punishment*, are all written for the admonition of every private christian, who must expect the *same* fate, if he takes the *same* way to deserve it.

To conclude: the consideration of these things very much concerns every one of us here present.

It concerns myself, lest, when I have preached them to you, I myself, as the Apostle speaks, "should be a castaway."

[1 Cor. 9. 27.]

It concerns the very *youngest persons* that hear me, that they may beware of falling into a wicked course of life, which shall *harden* their hearts, and *blind* their eyes, and *grieve* the Holy Spirit of God by which they were sanctified.

It concerns such as are *in health*, and in the prime of their years, lest sickness, calamities, and death, should come upon them unawares.

And nobody doubts but that it concerns such as are *old*, for *their* appointed time cannot be very long.

As for such as are *ignorant* of their duty, and know not how to walk, and to please God, it concerns them to look out for better instruction, lest they pass their days in ignorance, and die in their sin.

For such as *hold the truth in unrighteousness;* that is, who *believe* and *know* their duty, and yet live like heathens that know not God, it concerns such to look about them, lest in a very short time they have their portion with devils, who believe as well as they, but yet for their rebellion tremble under the dreadful wrath of God. [Rom. 1. 18.]

Lastly; it concerns every body, even the very best of us, to take notice, that *this is the day of visitation.*

God VISITS every one of us: to such as are ignorant, He sends *instruction* by His ministers; to such as are *careless,* He sends His *judgments* to awaken them; to such as are at *ease,* He sends *calamities;* and to *wean our affections from this life,* He often visits us with sickness.

He visits us by His *Holy Spirit.* Such as *fear* Him, and are dejected, He *comforts them;* such as are *weak,* and *pray* to Him for help, *them* He strengthens; to such as have made good use of the graces He has bestowed upon them, to them He gives more grace; and from them that go on to abuse His mercies, He takes away what before He had given them.

In one word, in this instance of the Jews, every christian may see his own destiny. They had all the favours shewed them that their hearts could desire, and so have all christians; they were chastised when they forgot God, and so are we; they were told of, and threatened with approaching judgments, and yet very few regarded, till they came upon them like a flood. And is not this the case of too many christians, who have felt the punishment of their sins before

SERM. XLIII.

they would be persuaded to believe that any such thing would ever befal them?

What now can I add more, than only to desire every one of you, to consider with me, that *this day of visitation, this day of grace,* will have an end, and *that very soon,* with every one of us here present: that therefore it is our interest and concern, to think of what must follow; namely, first, *Death;* secondly, *Judgment;* then either *Hell* or *Heaven.*

These are called the FOUR LAST THINGS. And the serious consideration of these I would leave upon your spirits; beseeching God of His mercy to possess all our souls with a lively sense of these important things, and with the great concern they ought to be to us; that the thoughts of *death* may mortify in us all pride and vanity, all covetousness and worldly-mindedness, all carnal security and fondness for this life, and oblige us to a strict watchfulness while we continue in this state of temptation and trial; that the consideration of a *judgment* to come may oblige us all to a strict holiness, and may make us careful of our *thoughts, designs, words,* and *actions,* which must all then come to light and be tried.

Let this oblige us, therefore, to *try, examine,* and to *judge* ourselves, that we may not be condemned of the Lord, when He cometh to judge the world in righteousness.

And if the difficulties of an holy life affright us; if the commands of Jesus Christ and the example He has set us, seem hard to flesh and blood; then let us seriously consider, whether is easier to serve God now, or to *dwell with everlasting burnings* hereafter?

Lastly; let us consider the very happy estate of all such as are dead in peace, and in the favour of God; and let the constant expectation of that happy day that shall let us into Paradise, and a faith and hope full of immortality, sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life, and raise our sense and value for the joys of heaven so high, that we may no longer doat upon the short appearances of happiness we meet with here.

O Thou, Who hast redeemed us with Thy precious blood, make us so to behave ourselves here, that we may be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting!

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XLIV.

THE GREAT DUTY OF INSTRUCTING THE IGNORANT.

MARK iv. 28.

The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

THOUGH this parable is *not* particularly explained, and applied by Christ Himself, as many of His parables are; yet we easily gather what the design of it is, from other places of Scripture: "He that soweth the seed is the Son of Man: the ground is the world: the harvest is the end of the world: the reapers are the angels." Thus much is plain from St. Matthew xiii. 37, &c. Therefore, the meaning of these words is this:

The Son of *Man*, Who is also the Son of *God*, having planted the Gospel in the world, and declared it to be the way of salvation; having caused it to increase, and established it by ways extraordinary, and far exceeding the powers of art, or nature, or any power but that of God; He did afterwards leave it to *subsist*, to *increase*, to *prosper*, to *come to perfection*, by the ordinary means He had appointed, and by the ordinary assistance of His grace and providence. For so did the husbandman in the parable: after he had manured and wrought his ground; after he had sown it, and done *his* part, he leaves it in the hand of Providence, not doubting but he *shall* (in God's good time) see the fruit of his labour. In the mean time, he follows his other business, "he sleeps and rises night and day," and still he observes an orderly increase; "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

It is true all this is done *he knows not how;* but done he

SERM. XLIV.

finds it to his comfort. And though weeds and tares in abundance spring up amongst the corn, to his great trouble and discouragement, yet, when the harvest shall come, it will be found that his labour was not in vain. Now, *this parable*, thus explained, furnisheth us with several *useful observations* suitable to the *occasion* for which I have chosen them. Such are these following:

First; *That the promoting the kingdom of God*, or *the setting forward the design of the Gospel, is very consistent with the ordinary business of life.* When the husbandman has cast his seed into the ground, he finds himself obliged to take care of a great many things besides; and yet his crop prospers as much as if he minded nothing else but that.

Secondly; *That in promoting the kingdom of God, we ought to be satisfied with the ordinances of Christ*, and not be ever and anon looking for, and depending upon extraordinary appearances in our favour. When the corn is sown, it is left to the ordinary providence and blessing of God, Who gives an increase according to the goodness of the ground, and the means made use of to improve it.

Thirdly; *That such as are any way engaged in promoting the kingdom of God, ought not to be discouraged because they do not immediately see the fruit of their labours.* The seed springs and grows up *we know not how;* and so does the kingdom of God.

Lastly; *A time will come when we shall certainly reap where we have sown.* There will be an harvest, and then we shall find that our labour has not been in vain in the Lord.

I. To begin with the *first* of these observations; *That the promoting the kingdom of God is very consistent with the ordinary business of life.*

A man may, besides the ordinary duties of Christianity, do a great deal towards promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of men, and yet his worldly affairs need not suffer by his being so employed.

There are two great mistakes, which people are apt to run into, and which ought to be rectified.

Some are ready to conclude, that all the time which is not spent in devotion (though to the hindrance of their necessary worldly concerns) is in a manner lost. It is this which fills

the monasteries in the Church of Rome; people vainly imagining, that it is more meritorious to spend the greatest part of their time in holy exercises, of prayers and praises to God, than to labour for and to relieve the poor; to strive with, and to overcome the temptations of an evil world (which is one great part of our business in it). And yet our blessed Lord assures us, that the sentence at the last day will, in a more especial manner, proceed upon such questions as these: Whom have you visited in their affliction? Whom have you fed, and clothed, and comforted? How they that retire out of the world, and get out of the sight of these miserable objects—how *they* can answer such questions to their comfort, cannot well be imagined.

But there are others who run into quite a contrary mistake; who fancy, that religion, and special acts of piety, belong to the clergy only,—that it would be the very ruin of people of business, to be exact in their devotions, to be solicitous for the wants and necessities of the poor, to be concerned to have the ignorant instructed, or the wicked reclaimed.

Now, both these are much in the wrong.

All people are plainly under an obligation to pray to God, and to praise Him for His mercies; all people are bound, by their religion, to be helpful to their fellow-creatures that are in want, or misery; and lastly, all people are bound in duty to provide for themselves and families. And yet, these are duties which in their turns may all be performed, and very acceptably, to Almighty God. Blessed be God, that we have an argument and proof of this, so ready at hand.

You that are engaged in this good work, which you have desired me to recommend[a], do *you* find, by experience, that having undertaken a charity which has *some* care and trouble attending it, do *you* find, that it straitens you in your time; that it obliges you to neglect your callings or families; that your worldly business succeeds worse; or that, upon the whole, you are sufferers for having concerned yourselves in these charities?

One may be sure it is quite otherwise, because that neither

[a] This sermon was preached before the societies for the education of poor children, at St. Lawrence Jury, 1710, and at St. Dunstan's in the East, 1711.

SERM. XLIV.

the number nor the importunity of those that expect relief, nor the disappointments you must needs meet with in carrying on a work of this nature, have yet been able to discourage you after so many years' experience,—I was going to say, *after so many years' trouble;* but when I consider who it is that has said "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" [Acts 20. 35.] that there is more satisfaction and happiness *in doing good* to others, than in receiving kindnesses ourselves; I forbear calling it a trouble, and I know you will pardon me.

And if those that are afraid of engaging in these works of charity, for fear of the trouble that attends them, or lest their worldly business might suffer by their loss of time; if such persons would but consider, how many hours they have to spare, how many they trifle away, how many they spend in vanity, and some, it is to be feared, in worse than vanity; one would hope that there would never want a number of men to *form societies of this kind,* to *countenance,* to *assist,* and to *support* one another, in promoting the glory of God, and the interest of His kingdom.

II. And this brings us to the second observation; *That in promoting the kingdom of God, we ought to be satisfied with the ordinances of Christ* (Who best knew how to promote His Father's glory); and not to be looking for, or depending upon, extraordinary appearances in our favour, lest we tempt God to leave us to ourselves, and the ways of our own devising.

And this, indeed, seems to be the main design of *this* parable; to shew us that Jesus Christ, having established His kingdom amongst men, hath left it, *until His coming again,* to *subsist,* to *increase,* and *prosper,* by the means of grace which He has appointed, and by the ordinary assistances of the Holy Spirit.

That He came forth from God, and declared unto us the true will of God: it was necessary we should be convinced of *this,* by some way extraordinary. This He did, by plain and undoubted miracles, by fulfilling the many prophecies which expressly foretold His *birth,* His *condition,* and His *sufferings;* and especially, by His *resurrection from the dead,* He was (as the Apostle observes) "declared to be the Son of God, with power." [Rom. 1. 4.]

Having thus sown the seed of the kingdom by His own hand, He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, "there to reign, till He has put all enemies under His feet;" or, in the words of the parable, "till the harvest shall come." [1 Cor. 15. 25. [Matt. 13. 30.]

But before He left the world, that He might not lose *the travail of His soul,* the fruits of His labour, He appointed a *standing ministry,* and other *means of grace,* as pledges of His truth and love, until His coming again. [Is. 53. 11.]

Amongst other means, that of *instructing the ignorant* is the foundation of all the rest,—a method which has been very happily chosen, and heartily pursued of late, in order "to bring men from the power of Satan unto God." For thus men are dealt with *as reasonable creatures;* they are shewed their duty, and the danger of neglecting it; they have the hopes and fears of the world to come truly represented to them; they have the means of grace freely offered them; and they are left without excuse, if they despise or neglect their own salvation. [Acts 26. 18.]

And if this method of instruction ever come to be slighted or disused, the consequence would, no doubt of it, be very fatal to Christianity.

To be dealt with as reasonable creatures, we must be informed, what our condition is; in what relation we stand to God; what it is he expects from us; what we have to fear if we neglect His commands; and what we may hope for, if we live in obedience to His laws; how we may overcome the corruption of our nature; what Jesus Christ has done for us, and what *we* must do ourselves, towards working out our own salvation. When this is done after a plain and easy way, and suited to the capacities of those we instruct, it is hardly possible to say what can be done more, towards bettering the world.

The great and plausible objection to this way of instruction has always been *this:* that wickedness is at a great height; that the work of reformation goes but slowly on by these ordinary methods; that it were to be wished God would appear in some extraordinary manner, to *awaken,* to *convince,* and to *convert* men.

From wishing this, people of warm heads have often come

SERM. XLIV.

to attempt it; and there has scarce been any age, in which some or other have not appeared with these pretences, and new commissions from God, *for reforming the world;* never considering, that the kingdom of God is so often compared by our Saviour to *corn sown in the earth,* to *a grain of mustard-seed set in the ground,* to *leaven hid in meal,* to signify to us, that the Gospel is to be propagated, and piety increased, by the usual methods of Providence, and the silent influences of God's good Spirit, not with pomp, and noise, and strange appearances.

[Matt. 13. 24, 31, 33.]

It is true, the giddy world is very apt to be taken with, and imposed upon, by new and surprising pretenders to reformation; and there never want men of evil designs, who, mixing with the ignorant and well-meaning, do not fail of gaining proselytes. But, in the mean time, religion suffers by these pretenders, and the world has not at all been mended by their preaching.

For bad as the world is, men in general are not so mad yet as to lay by their regular teachers, and despise the ordinances of God, at the instance of such persons as bring no warrant for what they affirm besides their own testimony.

I mention these instances, to convince you *of the societies,* that the methods you take for the instruction of children destitute of help and learning, are most agreeable to the ways of God's appointment, and most likely (by the blessing of God) to promote His glory, and a reformation of manners, so much wished for by all good men.

III. From this then we proceed to the third observation, *that such as are engaged in the good work of promoting the kingdom of God ought not to be discouraged, because they do not see immediately the fruit of their labours.* "The seed springs, and grows up we know not how, and so does the kingdom of God."

[Mark 4. 27.]

Good men have ever been apt to despond, and suspect the worst, when they have taken a serious view of the world, and seen its wickedness. The children of Israel, (saith the sorrowful Prophet,) "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left." But what saith the answer of God? "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men that have not bowed to the image of Baal."

1 Kings 19. 14, 18.

But let the world be as bad as it will (and that is bad enough, God knows), this should neither discourage us from endeavouring to mend it, nor put us upon unwarrantable ways of doing it.

It is very certain, that when Jesus Christ lived in the world, and His Apostles after Him, there was as great a degeneracy amongst those people with whom they conversed, as ever there has been since; and yet they made use of the same methods of converting men, as we do at this day, *and of no other, after once their mission was proved and established.*

They exhorted the Jews to read the Scriptures; and assured the Gentiles, that unto *them* God had granted repentance unto life; that both one and the other ought to repent and turn unto God, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. [Acts 11. 18.]

They exhorted parents to bring up their children in the fear of God; children to be obedient to their parents; masters to treat their servants well, and servants to be faithful to them.

In short, what they then delivered to the world to be *believed* and *done*, *we*, at *this* day, endeavour to recommend and press the very same truths.

And as those truths (though coming from the mouth of the Son of God) were rejected by many then, so we must not be surprised, if they are still despised by too many now; nor ought *our* ministry, nor *your* worthy endeavours, to be despised, because the world is much unreformed, notwithstanding all we can do.

But after all, we have not so melancholy a prospect before us as this comes to; here is abundance of *good seed* sown in this place, and in many places of the kingdom.

Besides those that are instructed by their pious parents, there are many thousands who have none else to take care of them; there are many thousands of these *at this day* educated and brought up in the knowledge and fear of God, by the care and charity of others. And are we to hope for no good from all this? Will *they*, when they are grown up, will they *all* forget their God, their benefactors, the principles in which they have been educated, the duties they have been taught, and the sins they have been warned against? God forbid we should think so ill of the great Lord of the world,

SERM. XLIV.

Who blesseth the labours of the husbandman with a constant increase; and why should not we be confident He will bless our endeavours with proportionable success?

But whatever shall be the visible fruits of your labours *now*,

IV. *There is a time coming when we shall certainly reap according as we have sown. There will be an harvest.* And as *that* is the husbandman's *great comfort*, so ought it to be *ours*. It will be a subject of comfort upon *two accounts especially*, as we shall certainly see the *fruit* of our labours, and as we shall meet with the *rewards* of our labours.

To see those whom we have plucked as firebrands out of the fire, giving God eternal praises for His goodness, in making *us* the instruments of their *conversion* and *salvation*. To find the Lord of heaven and earth, Who needs none of our services, yet accepting of our poor endeavours, and rewarding them beyond our utmost wishes! The thoughts of this is sufficient to make us bear with patience the discouragements we meet with; and still strive steadily to pursue the work we have undertaken, "to bring men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." [Acts 26. 18.]

And now, to come to a conclusion of this discourse. The *charities* I am to recommend to you are well known to all that hear me. As there are in all places, and especially in great towns, very many poor who have cast off all modesty, and can ask relief with assurance, and without restraint; so there are a great many, who will suffer very much before they can prevail with themselves to let their necessities be known. I am therefore to put you in mind, that one part of what you think fit to give, will faithfully and religiously be laid out upon such objects as these.

We all readily allow, that these are the *true objects of charity;* but it is not in every body's way to find them out. Now, here we have them found out by persons who delight to do good; and we have an opportunity of relieving families which would blush to ask or to receive our alms in public, and yet cannot subsist without help. Thus will one part of your alms be bestowed.

As for the *other part*, it will, *beyond controversy*, be laid out to the best purposes in the world; in giving a Christian

education to those whose hard fortune it would be (without the help of others) to live and die in vice and ignorance. For that there are very many, in the very throng of christians, who know little of *God*, of *themselves*, or of their errand into the world, who live in vicious courses, and die without fear of danger, is a truth too plain to be questioned. And though this can never be wholly prevented by the piety and industry of men, yet it is a worthy attempt (and God has wonderfully blessed the undertaking) to rescue so many thousands, in this and most great towns in these nations, from extreme poverty, and the consequences of it, which are generally *want of instruction, gross ignorance, great temptations to vice*, and a *proneness* to run into it.

Now, to *countenance*, to *promote*, and to *continue* this great and good work, is one great occasion of our meeting at this time; a work, in which every one present *is*, or *ought* to be, concerned; some to give, and others faithfully to manage what is given to this purpose.

The advantages will be very many; the number of evil examples will every day be lessened; a great many families, *knowing* and *fearing* God, will *in His good time* be established; a great many among these, gratefully remembering the hand that raised them out of the dust, will be ready hereafter to continue this sort of charity to future generations. In the mean time, we shall be no losers by what we give; it is seed sown, which will have its increase *infallibly*. And indeed, could we but see all the benefits attending this charitable work, we should give with that cheerfulness which good men feel when they are sure they are laying up their treasure in heaven.

In one word; it is by the good blessing of God, that so many of us here present want nothing that is needful either for our souls or our bodies; whatever we are able to give cometh of Him, and of *His own* do we give Him. [1 Chron. 29. 14.]

Let us therefore, instead of withholding our charity, let us beseech God to pardon all our vain expences; to make us so careful of His blessings, as that we may always be able and ready to offer some testimony of our gratitude for the many blessings we have received from God, to be given where His providence shall direct us to give.

SERM. XLIV.

And the good Lord give a blessing to all our charities, and especially to this before us, that they may continue, and always answer the ends proposed by them.

And God Almighty grant, if ever it should be His pleasure to change our circumstances into a worse condition, that we may bear it patiently, knowing that we have a treasure in heaven.

To which place, &c.

SERMON XLV.

THE DANGER OF LIVING IN ANY KNOWN SIN.

ROMANS i. 28.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. See Exod. 10 27; 14. Zeph. 1. 17.

IF people were but as well aware and afraid of the *causes* of God's forsaking men and leaving them to themselves, as they are startled at the very thoughts of the condition of those that are so given up, it is certain they would be more careful of their ways than generally they are.

Now, the reason here given why God left the heathens to themselves, and suffered them to fall into idolatry and all manner of wickedness, is this: *they would not retain God in their knowledge.* That is, they forgot their dependance upon Him; they were not afraid of His displeasure; they were not thankful for His favours; upon which God gave them up to a *reprobate mind,* or, as it is translated in the margin of our Bible, *a mind void of judgment.* In which words, we have a just account and reason of God's deserting men; of the causes and steps which lead to this dreadful judgment; and of the consequences and effects which attend it.

For the short account is *this:* men fall into sinful company and courses; and either from the good education they have had, or from the checks of natural conscience, finding it uneasy to live *in sin,* while they have a lively sense of God upon their souls, they therefore endeavour to divert such thoughts and fears as make them uneasy, until time, and

SERM. XLV.

wicked principles, and wicked company, reconcile them to every abomination. And that which most effectually helps on their ruin is this: they often sin with hopes and purposes of some time returning to sober reason, until they fall into such courses as make them forget both their purposes and their God.

Therefore, in treating upon this subject, I shall be obliged to lay before you *the danger of living in any known sin,* for that is the beginning of all our misery; and to shew you that people run a greater hazard than generally they are aware of, who go against their consciences in lesser things, and venture to break the laws of God, in hopes of taking up *when they please.*

And how necessary it is that we should be truly convinced of this, appears from hence, because most people do find, *by sad experience,* that they have fallen into such sins and courses, which, sometime in their lives, they abhorred the thoughts of; and because there was a time when the most profligate sinners hated those vices, which *now* they are so fond of, and were afraid of the anger of God, and His judgments, which *now* they despise.

It will therefore be of great use to us to know by what means men come to change their thoughts and practices so much for the worse; to know that the wickedness, and consequently the miseries of men, are owing to their own carelessness, and wilful continuing in known sin, and not to any harsh and fatal decree, which brings them to ruin; and that men are virtuous and good, not because they cannot be otherwise, but because they find it reasonable and just to be afraid of judgments and danger, when God gives them warning, and to avoid those things which He has told them will bring them to destruction; by which means they secure His favour and protection, and by His goodness and providence are kept from such wickedness as would otherwise ruin them.

So that we shall from hence learn how much every man ought to contribute to his own happiness, and how much he may contribute to his own misery, if he will be obstinately careless.

For thus much is *implied* in the text, that God hath given

us understanding souls; that He hath made Himself and His will so far known to us as is necessary and sufficient, by His assistance, to keep us from sin and misery. And so long as we retain in our minds this sense and knowledge of God, it will be a powerful means of keeping us from sin, of securing ourselves in His favour, and of attaining that happiness which we so passionately wish for.

Then what follows is *expressed* in the text, which is, that if men, thus furnished with the knowledge of God and of their duty, and with a power of choosing well, are, notwithstanding, careless of themselves and their ways; if they will "not retain God in their knowledge," but drive Him from them by their wicked deeds; if they will continue to do so, then will God give them up to *a reprobate mind;* that is, they will become incapable of judging what is good, of choosing what is safe, and of avoiding what is dangerous. For God will leave them to themselves, and remove all those hindrances which before kept them from the foulest vices: and whereas, they made wickedness their choice *before* against reason, they shall at last become unable to think, to act, to live, like men endued with reason.

This is, I think, a just account of these words, and of that power which every man has, of contributing very much to his own present and future happiness, by the grace of God assisting him.

I know this text has sometimes been made use of to back and keep up an ungrateful and an unnecessary controversy in the Church of God. But who doth not see that it is much easier from these words to persuade men to be good from the assurance of God's assisting grace, and to deter them from evil, because of the danger of continuing in known sin, than it would be to give them the least satisfaction from hence about the difficult points of election and reprobation?

And because I am sure it will be a work much more useful to you, and more acceptable to God, to endeavour to mend your lives, rather than to gratify your curiosities, I do therefore choose these words for a discourse altogether practical; in which I shall consider man under these two very different circumstances:

SERM. XLV.

First, *As he is under the especial care and protection of God;* that is, so long as he retains God in his knowledge, life, &c.

Secondly; *As he is forsaken of God, and left to himself.*

I. And *first;* it is necessary we should be made sensible of our condition, as we are under the care, direction, and providence of God; that we may be thankful for it, endeavour to improve it, and careful not to forfeit so great a blessing.

That God made man upright, we are sure, because He that made us has told us so; that is, He hath given us an understanding soul, a desire after happiness, and an aversion to, an abhorrence of such things as are unbecoming, or would be hurtful to us. From whence it is, that most people, before they have been corrupted by evil examples and wicked customs, are apt to blush and start at lesser vices, as men usually do when any thing unnatural or dangerous comes near them. And many there are, who, by the grace of God, preserve this natural modesty, and their innocence, till they come to an age of reason and instruction, and know for certain that there is more hurt in sin than the shame that attends it.

For God vouchsafes to instruct those that will hear and obey His word, and makes them see the folly and the danger of transgressing His commands. He gives His holy angels charge concerning them. His Holy Spirit is ever present with them, to enlighten their minds with saving truth; by which good Spirit they are enabled to know the will of God, and to do what He requireth of them; by Him they are put in mind of their duty when they forget it, corrected when they are backward and negligent, supported under all temptations, comforted under afflictions; the Holy Ghost from time to time increasing His favours, as men make good use of them.

And that thus it really is with all such as are under the government of God's Holy Spirit, not only the Word of God assures us, but daily experience will convince us; for why are some men better than others? Why do some avoid, resist, overcome, temptations to impiety, and others greedily swallow every bait that lies in their way?

It is plain, it is not from ourselves that we are not all equally wicked; for we are all by nature born in sin, and

equally prone to it; but God by His grace and His providence interposes, sometimes by diverting men's evil designs, by ruffling their consciences, by laying invisible restraints upon their lusts and passions, or by the natural and visible distempers of the body, breaking the force, and curbing the unruly and headstrong desires of the soul. For, as Elihu in the book of Job observes, "If men are bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction, then is God shewing them their works, and their transgression; by this means He openeth their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity." chap. 36. 8—10.

Now, as many as hear His voice, and will be governed by His Spirit and laws; all that are serious and thoughtful of what must come hereafter, or, in other words, *they that endeavour to retain God in their knowledge*, by hearing His holy Word, by praying to Him for what they want, and by giving Him thanks for what they receive at His hands; such men are beloved of God, assisted and governed by His Spirit, and are secure from fear of evil.

II. But so are not they that *do not retain God in their knowledge*. For they are constantly in danger of doing such things as will expose them to shame, troubles, and misfortunes, while they live; and, when they die, they are sure to change this unhappy life for a much worse. For what should restrain them from doing every wickedness which comes within their knowledge and power?

When there was no King in Israel, the consequence, you know, was, "that every man did that which was right in his own eyes." And when a man has once discharged God from that supreme power He hath, and ought to have, over the heart and soul, that man will do what seems good to himself, though all the world besides count him a fool and a madman. [Judg. 17. 6.]

We meet indeed with men who have very airy notions of honour, of what is right and wrong; and believe that principles of reason and experience, and a sense of what is fit and becoming an understanding creature, will keep them from such a pitch of folly and wickedness as shall expose them to shame, danger, and the anger of God.

But then it is not well considered, that men have very

SERM. XLV.

different notions of what is good and praiseworthy; nor is it considered, that interest, and passion, and vice, will change the sentiments. So that a man, who at one time of his life thought such a thing dishonourable, may come at last to be reconciled to that very action, and with eagerness and delight commit it.

And is there any wickedness which can be named, that men born with reason, but destitute of the grace of God, have not been guilty of? Our first parents are an instance sufficient to shew us what reason, *in its greatest perfection*, when left to itself, will end in; namely, in the destruction of those that trust to it. And will any man on earth pretend to govern himself by reason better than they did?

And if a person who had such excellent notions of justice and temperance as that prince had, who first debauched the wife, and then murdered the husband; if two such succeeding crimes could gain upon him, notwithstanding his knowledge, experience, and the commands of God to the contrary, *who* afterwards will pretend that reason, natural conscience, honour, or any thing but the Spirit of God, can secure a man's innocence?

In short, there is nothing so wicked, nothing so base, dishonourable, or destructive, that one man is guilty of, but another is by nature capable of being so.

And though this will look strange to one who finds in his breast a perfect abhorrence for some vices, and supposes he should die, rather than be guilty of them; yet he may perhaps change his thoughts, when he considers that there are few people who, in many instances, do not come to be in love with sins, which once in their lives they had a hearty dislike to.

The Scriptures have given us several very noted examples of this. "Am I a dog," said Hazael to the Prophet, "that ever I should do such vile things as you speak of?" And yet for all this abhorrence, he did those very wicked actions. "Though I die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee in any wise," saith St. Peter; and after all, being left for one moment to himself to make that promise good, you know how it ended.

[2 Kings 8. 13.]

[Mark 14. 31.]

Now these things are written for our example, that we

may see what poor, weak creatures we are by nature; that we may learn not to value ourselves, not to trust in our own reason or strength, or in any thing but *the living God;* for if He once desert us, we are undone for ever.

For as we have no power of ourselves to do any thing that is good; as we have no power of ourselves to resist temptations, and that evil spirit, "who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" so shall we have no power of ever returning to sober reason, of ever repenting of our sins, or of qualifying ourselves for future happiness. [1 Pet. 5. 8.]

For those who, by open and avowed profaneness, by living in hypocrisy, or in a continued state of wickedness, have forced God to leave them to themselves, such persons are proof against all those means which God makes use of to reduce mistaken men.

The Word of God, *how powerful soever it be,* cannot convince one who will never hear it with seriousness; the examples of good men will have no effect upon one who has used himself to despise them; the judgments of God upon the wicked will make no impressions upon one who has accustomed himself to call them mere accidents; nay, miracles themselves, though they are called for by unbelievers, and are indeed a sure sign that God is present with those that work them *in His name,* even miracles themselves are not sufficient to convert an obstinate sinner, whose affections are to be changed, as well as his judgment, which miracles cannot effect. A remarkable instance of which we have in Acts iv. 16; where the Jews own that indeed a notable miracle had been done by the Apostles, as was manifest to all Jerusalem, and *we* (say they) cannot deny it: why then, sure they received their testimony: very far from it! But instead of that, they threatened and commanded them to speak no more, or teach in the name of Christ.

Nothing could be more unreasonable than this, or more effectually shew the difficulties men lay themselves under of being reformed, when once they have made themselves incapable of judging betwixt good and evil, by a long course of wickedness.

One need not use more words to convince any thoughtful man, that as there is nothing upon earth which can give

SERM. XLV.

greater satisfaction to the soul of man than the assurance of being under the care and protection of God, so there is no estate so truly terrible as that of a man's being abandoned of God and left to himself.

By what steps and means men bring themselves into this sad estate, is what we now come to consider: "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge;" that is, they did not endeavour to keep up such a sense of God in their minds as was necessary to secure His favour and protection, but they depended upon themselves, their own reason, and strength; they neglected His word, and the cautions therein contained; they did not fear His threatenings, nor think upon His promises; they did not ask His help, nor give Him thanks for the common mercies they enjoyed. And this is the way that all who *are* ruined bring destruction upon themselves.

Most people, at least in the beginning of their days, feel in their souls an aversion for many vices they see in others. Thus they think it will always be with them; this makes them less careful of their ways; by degrees they grow more careless; this makes them more wicked; and wickedness being countenanced by multitude of examples, they grow bold and fearless of what may come hereafter.

During this time, the Spirit of God strives to reduce them; [Job 33. 14.] "for God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not;" Whom if they refuse to hear, to repent, and turn to God, God will at last give them up to themselves, and to the government of those evil spirits, whose business and whose pleasure it is, to bring to destruction all those who put themselves out of God's protection.

Now, that this is truly the case of wicked men, that this is matter of fact, and not arguments only to frighten people, is plain from hence: ask a man who is going to suffer for his villanies, whether ever he suspected it would come to this, that he should do such things as would bring him to an untimely end? Ask the spendthrift who wants bread, whether he dreamt of such a change? In short, let every sinner ask himself, (and then we shall all be convinced,) let us all ask ourselves, whether by giving way to our appetites, we have not done such things as some time we abhorred, and never feared our being guilty of them?

This consideration furnisheth us with an account of those horrid crimes, which are but too frequently committed, and which even human nature startles at. For one man to murder another who never injured him; for a woman to strangle the child of her womb; for a man to blaspheme Him Who with one word can send him to hell:—these are wickednesses which we are amazed at, and wonder that any thing that carries the shape of a man, can be guilty of such crimes. But then we do not consider that human nature, as it is now corrupt, is the same in all men.

We are all subject to temptations; and if, by our repeated crimes, we should ever force the Spirit of God to leave us to ourselves, no man can tell, no man can foresee, what barbarous wickedness he shall at last be tempted to commit, nor what unwelcome, unlooked for calamity he may bring upon himself, while he goes from sin to sin, till he meets with destruction.

Now, from what has been said, we may very justly make these *following observations:* that no man will continue long at one certain pitch of wickedness, but either he must reform and grow better, or he will still grow more depraved and vicious. Our souls are very active beings, and we may truly say of them what we commonly do of children, that we must be employed in what is good, or we shall certainly be doing mischief: for not only one evil habit begets another, but the more a man sins, the less capable he still makes himself of judging what sin *is*, and what will be the consequences of continuing in it. And the influences of God's Holy Spirit, and the methods of His providence, have still less power upon his mind and soul, till he has quite forgotten God, till God has forsaken him, till he has filled up the measure of his wickedness, and till he meets with destruction.

Therefore, no man can be secure of himself, who will continue in the practice of any known vice; nor can he be sure that in time he shall not be reconciled to the most abominable wickedness; for no man can at first force himself to do what in time, and by degrees, he may make easy to his mind and practice.

Whoever considers some passages in the life of Solomon, will find a wonderful contradiction in his sentiments and his

SERM. XLV.

actions. And the first part of his life was so very different from the last, that those who do not consider how very fruitful sin is, and how apt to change the whole man, would hardly believe that one and the same person was *he* who in so pious a strain dedicated a temple to the God of heaven, and *he* who afterwards fell into the grossest idolatry. But the steps he took were such as would effectually change him so much for the worse. He went against the express command of God in taking wives from amongst the idolatrous nations; he depended upon his own reason and strength, believing that he could never forget and forsake that God Who had after so gracious a manner appeared to him, and had given him such an uncommon share of wisdom.

But this effectually shews, that neither the greatest share of wisdom, nor the best education, nor the greatest favours of God, are sufficient to secure us, when once we leave the commands of God. For this prince's advantages, that he had above others, made him careless; this brought him to intemperance; his ease and intemperance made him a slave to his lusts, and his wives; and these made him as great an idolater as any of those nations, which God, for that sin, had cast out of the land of Canaan; by which he brought upon himself, and entailed upon his family, such troubles as ended in the destruction of it.

And thus it will be with every man living, who knowingly allows himself in the practice of what God has forbidden him.

There is no man who did not sometime in his life count *drunkenness* a sin; and those that are yet undebauched cannot imagine what it is that can bewitch men to make them fond of a sin which disorders both body and mind. And yet how does custom prevail to draw in those who once abhorred the vice; and to how many other sins this leads is so well known, that it need not here be mentioned.

The same may be observed of that too common sin of *swearing*, which example and impunity have made so easy to too many, that they count it amongst the faults of human frailty (though to a considering man it is a most horrid crime); for it leads men naturally to speak of God without fear and without reverence. This leads them to impiety, to atheism, and to damnation.

And indeed there is no security, until a man has so far gained upon himself that he can be content to hear the voice of God within him, and to obey the dictates of his conscience; till he can resolve to put a stop to the very beginning of vice, and knows for certain, that to allow of any one known sin, is but too sure a way to fall into another.

Therefore, it is strange to see men confident that for themselves they shall never do such things as others are blamed and punished for; when at the same time they freely indulge themselves the liberty of such things as grieve the Spirit of God, by Whom alone they are kept from the greatest villanies.

And this brings us to *another observation* from these words, that God does never suspend His grace, while men continue worthy of such a mercy; that is, while there is any hope (and God knows it very well) whether His grace will not be still abused, and still despised.

The goodness and the justice of God give us all the assurance imaginable of the truth of this; and the constant methods of His providence shew us, that He leaves no means untried which may become a merciful Father, and a just Creator, to bring His children and creatures to their duty and happiness.

And therefore, though we have many ways provoked the justice of God, yet we are sure He has not given us up to ourselves, if we are sorry for our miscarriages, and are resolved to take up for the time to come; for such thought and such purposes come from the good Spirit of God, Which never doth any thing in vain.

But then, this is no reason why a man should still continue in sin, in hopes that the same good Spirit will some way or other preserve him from ruin; for, it is true, God doth wonderfully prevent us while there is any hope of a reformation; but when that is over, when we have wearied the patience and long-suffering of God (*for He will not strive with us for ever*); then we may expect to be given over to a reprobate mind. [Gen. 6. 3.]

This then is the use we are to make of this knowledge:

First; We should always endeavour to live in the fear of God, that we may not consent to known iniquity. This was

SERM. XLV.

the holy Psalmist's rule: "I have set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall;" that is, he endeavoured to have it always in his mind, that God was ever present with him, saw all his actions, heard all his words, and knew the very thoughts of his heart.

Ps. 16. 9.

Secondly; If at any time we fall, what have we to do but to follow the example of the same Psalmist: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." And let us not fancy that we can repent and turn to God when we please; but remember, that every sin a man knowingly commits, the more careless and the more hardened he grows, and consequently more unfit for God's grace, without which no man ever did repent.

Ps. 119. 60.

Thirdly; When the Holy Spirit of God puts into our minds good thoughts and desires, we see how dangerous a thing it is to strive to divert them. And we shall not do so, if we remember the dreadful words of God: "Because I called and ye refused; ye set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I will therefore laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh."

Prov. 1. 24—26.

Lastly; We see how dangerous it is to neglect the means of grace which God has appointed to keep up a sense of His majesty in our hearts. People do not consider, that we cannot please God, but in the ways of His own appointment; so that no man can tell what he shall do, what he shall be, when once he ventures to leave or to neglect the means of grace afforded him in the Church of God.

In short, if we are under the conduct of the Spirit of God, we may know that we are so by these short observations:

First; We shall be *very humble,* knowing that we have nothing of our own to boast of; "for it is God that worketh in us both a will and a power to do any thing that is good."

[Phil. 2. 13.]

Secondly; We shall be very careful of our ways, knowing that we are under the direction of an Holy Spirit, Who will forsake those that grieve Him by their evil deeds.

Lastly; We shall be very *thankful,* that God is pleased to take the government of us Himself, and not to leave us in the hands of our own counsel, for then we are sure to be undone. And we shall strive to express our gratitude by doing what He has commanded us.

On the other hand, they that live in any known sin, they that are careless of their souls, they that neglect the ordinary duties of religion, may be assured of it, that they are taking themselves out of God's protection, and putting themselves into the service of the devil; and that they cannot go back *when* they please into the service of God, no more than they can go to heaven without the leave of God.

To conclude the whole.

Happy are those who from being great sinners become worthy penitents; but the ways of sin are extremely dangerous, and the return to righteousness difficult, irksome, and hazardous.

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, are the circumstances of those who, from their very youth being taught to know and to fear the Lord their Maker, are careful not to grieve His Holy Spirit, by consenting to, and continuing in known iniquity; for then that good Spirit will ever be present with them, to lead them in the way they should go, until all danger will be over, and they are secure from fear of evil: which God grant we may all be in His good time, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving, now and for ever. *Amen.*

XV.

SERMON XLVI.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, AND EVENING AFTER THE SACRAMENT.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE JEWS A WARNING TO CHRISTIANS.

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1 Cor. x. 11.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, &c.

In this chapter the Apostle shews (and that by the example of the Israelites), that to be in covenant with God, and to partake of the sacraments, which are the seals of the covenant, will not secure us from destruction, if we do not live worthy of such a favour.

ver. 1, &c. "I would not," saith he, "brethren, have you ignorant, that all our fathers were baptized as well as we, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink;" that is, they were partakers of the same covenant, and sacraments, and promises, that we are; and yet notwithstanding all these privileges, those that were disobedient were destroyed in the wilderness, and never entered into the land of Canaan, which was *a figure of heaven.*

Now all these things were written for *our admonition;* that is, to warn us not to depend upon being christians, without living as becomes christians.

Let him therefore, who thinketh *he standeth,* that is, high [ver. 12.] in God's favour because he is a christian, *take heed lest he fall;* as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and never set their eyes upon the land of promise, which they so much desired.

When we hear the account of the strange behaviour of the people of Israel, while God was bringing them out of slavery,

in order to make them happy in a land of their own, we cannot but wonder at it; we are apt to think it impossible, that people should see so many miracles wrought in their favour, and yet should distrust, at every turn, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of that God That wrought them.

And yet so it was: and the Psalmist expresseth his wonder after a most elegant manner: "They were disobedient [Ps. 106. 7.] at the sea, even at the Red sea;" at the *very place* where God had saved them by the greatest miracle that ever man had seen.

In short, their whole life was one continued miracle; they had their meat from heaven, their garments waxed not old, their enemies fell before them, the visible judgments of God fell upon them over and over for their sins, and yet they were disobedient. The conclusion of all was, God was so provoked by their unworthy behaviour and ingratitude, that He suffered very few of them ever to enjoy the land of Canaan, which He had promised to give them.

But you will say, *What is this to us?* Why, I will tell you —the Apostle shall tell you,—these things were written for our admonition, *for a warning to us*, to let us know how God has ever dealt, and for ever will deal, with those that despise His mercies, and forbearance, and long-suffering.

In short, as the goodness of God, to those that obeyed Him amongst the Jews, was a figure of the favour and loving-kindness which He bears to all others that love and fear Him; so the severity of God to that whole nation, in suffering so few of them ever to set a foot on the promised land, is a figure of that severity with which He will deal with wicked christians; He will for ever shut them out of heaven, of which Canaan was a figure.

But we are apt to think, that we are not so *blind*, and *stubborn*, and *hard-hearted*, and *wicked*, as the Jews were. People are apt to think, that the world is now civilized, and that christians are not so liable to God's judgments as heretofore. I would to God it were so; but really it is not. Many that call themselves christians can make a shift to be as wicked as either Jews or heathens.

Observe the malice and envy with which one christian pursues another, rejoicing in the ruin and misery of their

SERM. XLVI.

fellow-creatures; laying snares for one another in all manner of business; scarce any security from another man's word or oath; all things carried by power, or interest, or craft; the *rich* oppressing the *poor*, because it is in the power of their hand to do it; and the *poor* envying the *rich*, instead of helping them by their prayers to heaven; *parents* educating their children after such a manner, as will ruin them as certainly *as if they intended their ruin*, teaching them to love the world with all their heart and soul, instead of renouncing it; suffering them to content themselves with a form of religion, without the power; *pastors* as little concerned for the flocks committed to their charge, as if in truth they were so many beasts, whose souls must die with their bodies.

In short, if the *Jews* were disobedient to God, so are christians; if *they* were ungrateful, so are *we*; if *they* were within the covenant of mercy, and yet lived as ill as those that were strangers to the covenant and promises, so do christians, who have yet greater things to fear and hope for, than ever *they* had; if *they* were delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the mighty hand of God, and yet as soon forgot the mercy as it was over, even so christians, who have been delivered from a greater tyranny and bondage than that of Pharaoh, do yet forget the mercy, and desire to return to the slavery of sin and death.

In one word; the Israelites in Egypt and in the wilderness are exact figures of christians in this world, and in their passage to the next, except in this one thing, that God being wearied as it were and provoked by their backslidings, did at last swear that none of them, that had so ungratefully abused His favours, should enter into the place of rest designed for them.

In this one thing we are happier than they, in that we have it *yet* in our power to work out our salvation; to appease our God by repentance, to avert His judgments by returning to our duty, and to secure to ourselves a share in His promise of heaven and happiness eternal.

[Heb. 3. 7, 8.]

What saith the Apostle to christians on this head? "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts;" for, as the *promises*, and *mercies*, and *assistances*, and *rewards*, to christians, far exceed those which God made to the Jews; so

the punishment which wicked christians will meet with will be infinitely greater than any they had to fear.

So very little reason have christians to value themselves upon the *better covenant,* and *better promises,* and *better means* of *grace,* which God has afforded them, if they do not make a *better use* of them.

Let us all, therefore, seriously consider this portion of Holy Scripture, and what befel the Jews for their frequently provoking God by their sins; that is, that at last God for ever shut them out of Canaan.

Let us also fear, lest a promise being made us of entering into heaven, any of us should come short of it; ever remembering that the people of Israel had the same God, the same promises, the same law, that we have: and this advantage *we* have which they had not; we may learn by their example not to provoke God too far, lest He treat us with the same severity He did them; lest He shut us for ever out of the heavenly Canaan. [Heb. 4. 1.

To conclude; a Christian *name,* a Christian *faith,* the Christian *covenant,* the Christian *sacraments,* will not set us one step nearer heaven, without a Christian *life.* So that the case of christians is far from being better than that of Jews and heathens, if they are not careful to lead a Christian life.

SERMON XLVII.

THE REPENTANCE OF SINNERS MATTER OF JOY IN HEAVEN.

LUKE xv. 7, 10.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

THE Pharisees were much offended with our Lord for shewing so much concern for sinners as to keep them company, in order to teach them their duty, and to convince them of their danger.

Our Lord assures them, by these three parables [a], that God is well pleased when sinners are converted; that the angels rejoice at it; and that such as are at the pains to bring back poor, ignorant, or wicked people, that have gone astray like lost sheep, do a work very acceptable to God, and God will reward them for it.

In short, our Lord has, by these similitudes, discovered to us one of the most comfortable truths in the world, which is, that when men have offended God, yet if they become sensible of their sin, and truly sorry for it, God will pardon what is past, and take them into favour, as if they had never offended Him.

What is the reason that we can hear such Holy Scriptures as these without being moved? The reason is plain: we do not consider that we are sinners; we do not know what it is to be sinners; we are not sensible that every sinner is liable to the anger of God, is as one *lost* and *undone*, until he repent and be restored to God's favour.

[a] The parables of the lost sheep, of the piece of silver, and of the prodigal son.

Would you know the condition of a sinner, whose conscience is awake, and lets him see his sin and his condition?

Look upon *David*, when he had been guilty of adultery and murder; hear how *he* expresses his grief: "My sorrow is continually before me; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." [Ps. 38. 4.]

Look upon St. *Peter*, when he had denied his Lord, and thought upon it, you will find him *weeping bitterly*. [Matt. 26. 75.]

See the publican in the temple; he dares not so much as lift up his eyes, but smites upon his breast, and cries, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." [Luke 18. 13.]

Consider the penitent woman, at the feet of Jesus, *washing His feet with her tears*. What is all this for? Our Lord will tell you: "Her sins were many;" Christ had forgiven her upon her repentance; and thus she expresses her love and thankfulness: she looked upon it as the greatest *mercy* in the world to be restored to the favour of God, and she would not but shew it by her love and by her tears. [Luke 7. 47.]

And if we are not thus affected, when we consider how merciful God has been to us, it is because we are not truly sensible what it is to be out of His favour, what it is to be under His displeasure. In short, it is because our consciences were never well awake.

They that are whole (or think themselves so) *care not for a physician, but they that are sick. Come unto Me*, saith our Lord, *all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. [Matt. 9. 12; 11. 28.]

When once it is thus with men, they will hear these parables with delight, and receive the *doctrines* contained in them with cheerfulness.

They will understand, for instance, with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, that by the *shepherd*, who went to seek his *lost sheep*, is meant Jesus Christ, *Who came into the world to seek and to save sinners*. When they hear what pains he took to find it; how he took it upon his shoulders, how he rejoiced that he had found it, and called his friends and his neighbours to rejoice with him; they will then apply this parable to themselves; they will see plainly, that God desires their conversion; that if He desires it, He will afford them

SERM. XLVII.

all the means of being converted; that their souls are dear in His sight, or else He would not have sent His own Son to seek and to save them. *Then* they will see and acknowledge the tender love of this good Shepherd, Who spared no pains to find His lost sheep; they will therefore love Him, desire to please Him, and not willingly do any thing that may justly offend Him.

And when they hear again the *parable of the woman* that had lost a piece of silver, what concern she had upon her, what pains she took to find it, what pleasure she had when she had found it, they will easily see, that all this is matter of the greatest comfort to sinners; that if the angels rejoice upon the conversion of a sinner, it is because God is pleased with it, and because they know that God will not reject any that return to Him.

And they will still be more convinced of this, when they go on to consider the circumstances of the *prodigal son.* He left his father's house without his leave; that which his father gave him to maintain him decently, he spent upon harlots; he never thought upon his father, nor the sad affliction he gave him, till he could live no where else. These are all instances of a vile behaviour; and yet after all the father receives him without upbraiding him, and treats him after such a manner as if he had never done amiss.

And will God thus deal with sinners, that return to Him after all their wanderings; who, being sensible of their unhappy condition, desire His pardon and favour?

Yes, thus God will deal with His unhappy creatures; *unhappy* because they have offended Him, but *happy* in having such a Father, so full of goodness, so ready to pardon.

Will any sinner *after this* say, I would willingly return, if I could hope that God would receive and pardon me? A sinner may indeed say, I will not forsake my sins; I will not ask pardon; I will not return to my duty; but no man can say, if I should desire to return to God, He will not receive me.

Let us *all* then, for we are *all* sinners; let us *all* be encouraged to return to God by a sincere repentance: His *goodness* should lead us to it; our own danger should *spur* us on; the joys of heaven should invite us; and the examples

of others being received and pardoned, should encourage us to hope for the same merciful treatment.

In short, the parables we have read will bear witness against us at the last day, that God did invite us, but we unworthily despised His favours of mercy and pardon.

But what pretences have any sinners for not returning to God, and depending upon His pardon? Why, some say, that true repentance, being God's gift, if He is not pleased to call them effectually, it is impossible for them ever to return to Him, and to their duty.

But does He not call all sinners to repentance? Will He not make that call effectual to every one who will hear His voice?

How did He call the prodigal? He suffered him to take his own ways, till he made himself miserable; He suffered him to find no rest in the ways of sin; He put it into his mind, that he had a merciful father to return to; he resolved therefore, to try his father's goodness, and it fared with him accordingly, he was received and pardoned.

And will not, does not God do all this for every sinner? Does He not make sin uneasy to them? Do they find any rest in the choices they make to make them happy? Does He not call them by the voice of His own Son, and by the mouths of His ministers? Does He not assure them of His favour? And why is not this effectual? Why, because they will not attend to this call; because they will not pray for the graces they want; because they neglect the means of obtaining that grace which God has ordained; *so that their destruction is from themselves.*

But then there are others who give themselves for lost, because their sins are many and great. What! greater than the goodness of God; greater than the merits of His Son; greater than what a tender Father can forgive?

There are others still more perverse; who, because they know they are weak and subject to many failings, do therefore fear that their repentance will never be perfect, and so refuse to set about it; that is, they will not be saved, because they find they cannot save themselves. They will not consider, that men were not made to be independent of their Maker; that therefore they are taught to distrust themselves,

SERM. XLVII.

and to look up to God for help; that He knows all their weakness, and knows how to apply proper remedies to all their ailments; that His power is magnified in making a *poor, weak, backsliding* creature, in making dust and ashes, worthy of immortality.

As for those that have returned to God, and yet fear His anger, because of their unavoidable infirmities, they would do well to consider, whether the *good shepherd*, who took so much pains to seek for, and to bear his lost sheep home on his shoulders, who rejoiced so heartily because he had found it,—whether it is likely *he* would after cast it away, because it was not the best of his flock, or because it should afterwards be distempered. No; that very goodness, which made him to seek his lost sheep, will incline him to do every thing that is fit to save it from being for ever lost.

Let us all then meditate upon these instructive parables.

Let such as have received favours from God be careful not to abuse them to His dishonour, as the prodigal son did the portion of goods that fell to his share.

Let such as are under the chastising hand of God consider, as the prodigal did, that this is the great goodness of God, in order to reduce them from the error of their ways, and to save them from ruin.

Lastly; let us all meditate upon the mercies of God in Jesus Christ, that His mercy and goodness may lead us to repentance, which will be most acceptable to God, and happy for us all.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE DESIGN OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS UPON THE CHILDREN OF MEN[a].

MATT. vi. 11.

Give us this day our daily bread[b].

SCARCITY of BREAD is one of those four judgments with which God punisheth sinful nations. God's judgments are intended not only as punishments for past sins, but as warnings to prevent greater; and they are mild or severe, just as people are more or less ripe for vengeance. Ezek. 14. 12, &c.

Our case at present is something like that of the Jews, mentioned by the Prophet Amos: "I have given you cleanness of teeth, and want of bread, in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." chap. 4. 6.

Another of the Prophets sets down the cause of these judgments: "They did not know," that is, they did not consider, saith the Lord, "that it was *I* that gave them corn, and wine, and oil," that is, the blessings they enjoyed; "therefore, I will take away their corn; and their land shall mourn; yea, the beasts of the field, yea, the fishes of the sea shall be taken away." Hosea 2. 8, &c.

Now, by these judgments God is awakening us *to flee from the wrath to come;* and more especially from that wrath which awaits impenitent sinners in the world to come.

And indeed, we are never so truly sensible of God's dis-

[a] This sermon appears to have been preached in the year 1741, "a dreadful dear year," says the author, in a marginal note, "and scarcity of bread approaching to a famine."

[b] See 1 Tim. vi. 8. "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

SERM. XLVIII.

pleasure, and of our dependance upon Him, as when He makes us feel our want of help, and that none else can help us. "When Thy judgments are in the world," saith the Prophet, "the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness." And woe be to them if they do not; for that is a sure sign that they are ripe for destruction.

Isaiah 26. 9.

But this is not God's design in this visitation. His design is, as we said before, to awaken us into a sense of our manifold abuses of His blessings; into a lively sense of our dependance upon Him for life, and breath, and all the things we enjoy or hope for; and lastly, to amend what is amiss in us.

Many, very many, are the uses that we may, and *ought* to make of this visitation. Such as are *careless*, and in the midst of plenty, forgetting that it is God That gives them their daily bread, will now see upon Whom they depend for the necessaries of life.

In the next place, this visitation is certainly designed as a wholesome remedy against the scandalous abuse of God's good creatures; as also, to punish those whose God is their belly, as the Apostle speaks, who aim at nothing so much as to please their appetites, and to satisfy their lusts, without considering the wants and necessities of other people.

Phil. 3. 19.

It is too often the case in times of plenty, as it was with the Prodigal in the Gospel; when God gives men their portion, they squander it away in riotous living. And a mercy it is, when they are reduced to want, if they have the grace to see and repent of their evil ways.

And indeed the very best of us should be admonished by this scarcity and dearth, how often we have misspent the good gifts of God, which now would have been of blessed use to help those who have hungry bellies.

But above all, the glutton and the drunkard should be ashamed and blush, and bitterly repent, for having abused and wasted the good gifts of God, which are given for the support and comfort of man, not to make men into beasts.

But I must not forget my subject: "Give us this day our daily bread." How often have we said this; how often repeated this petition, without considering what a sad condition we should be in, if God should deny us our daily

bread; what a miserable condition those many are in who *now* feel the want of it; and lastly, what a *much worse* condition they are in, who have enough, and to spare, and will not help those that want their daily bread, but upon terms that ruin them.

Let me tell you a truth which few *know*, and *fewer* will *believe;* that the rich owe more to the poor for *their* prayers, than the poor owe to the rich for the relief they give them.

This is a truth as certain as the Gospel: "I was an hungered," saith Christ, "and ye gave Me meat; thirsty, and ye gave Me drink." Do but consider *when* Jesus Christ will say this to those that shall have relieved His poor members. Why, even then when He is going to pass the sentence of everlasting life, or eternal death, upon mankind. [Matt. 25. 35.]

This shews us, that the rich, as well as the poor, have reason to beg of God *to give them their daily bread;* that they may have an opportunity of forwarding their own salvation, by shewing their gratitude to God for His more especial favours to them.

If God gives any of us more than our daily bread, it is not because He loves us better than those that want it; but to try our *faith*, whether we will ascribe to Him the blessings we enjoy, or to ourselves, and our own endeavours and industry.

Men are but too apt *to sacrifice*, as the Scripture speaks, *to their own net;* that is, to ascribe the blessings they enjoy to their own industry, good fortune, care, or skill; and yet all this will not do without the blessing of God upon their labours. We see and feel this now to our sorrow; and that there is a necessity, besides our own industry, of begging of God to give us our daily bread; or it will be with us as St. Peter told our Lord, "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." [Hab. 1. 16.] [Luke 5. 5.]

As often, therefore, as we use this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," we do acknowledge our whole dependance to be upon God, our heavenly Father, for all things necessary for our souls and bodies. And then, to preserve in our minds a constant sense of this our dependance, we ask these blessings for the present day, knowing, that if we pray for these blessings to-morrow, God will then have the same

SERM. XLVIII.

fatherly care of us, and supply us with what is then necessary and convenient for us.

And observe, that we are directed to pray for bread only; that is, for the necessaries of life; because, as we are sinners, and in a state of trial and penance, it becomes us to ask no more than what is necessary to carry us through a state of trial.

Lastly; we are obliged to pray every day for bread, that we may every day remember to Whom we are indebted for life, and breath, and all the comforts of life and health.

Let us now consider, how this petition ought to be put in practice.

And first; the return of every meal should oblige us to beg that we may receive God's gifts with His blessing. Man does not live by bread alone, but by food which God gives a blessing to, to fit it for the nourishment of the body.

And then, forasmuch as this prayer is designed for the use of all, poor and rich, high and low; when the *rich* pray for their daily bread, they are supposed to beg of God His grace, that they may not be corrupted by His gifts, if He has given them more than the plain necessaries of life. And the *poor*, that they may not forfeit their right, by their idleness or discontent; but that God may give His blessing upon their honest endeavours for a livelihood. And, at the same time that they pray for their daily bread, they ought to pray for grace to be content with what God thinks proper to give them; that they may neither murmur, nor envy those that have more than their daily bread, nor attempt to get more, and better their condition by unjust ways.

In short, our present wants force us to see, and to feel, our dependance upon God, and to apply to Him for help. He is by these judgments punishing the abuse of His former mercies. Our duty is to repent of those sins, which have brought upon us this visitation, and to resolve, by His grace, which we must also pray for, that whenever it shall please God to turn this scarcity into plenty (for He only can do it), that we do not forget what we now feel and fear, by falling again into the sins of *luxury*, intemperance, and prodigality.

Let us remember, that frugality is every man's interest as well as duty,—that the rich may have to give to him that

needeth, and that the poor may not be tempted to get bread by ways which may ruin their souls as well as bodies.

Rather let us all that suffer in these hard times remember, that though afflictions of this kind are grievous to nature, yet, with regard to another life, they are of great advantage, when, through the grace of God, they are borne with patience and resignation to the divine will.

And may Almighty God sanctify all their bodily wants to the salvation of the souls of all that now feel the want of bread; and may His blessing be upon those who, having more than their daily bread, are ready to give, and glad to distribute, "laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life;" always remembering, that the measure of God's bounty and favour to them, ought to be the measure of their kindness to those that are in want. 1 Tim. 6. 19.

Lastly; let us never forget, whether poor or rich, that whenever we pray for our daily bread, we beg of God not to deny us the bread that nourisheth to eternal life, which God hath promised to give to them that ask Him.

This our Lord hath provided for us in the holy Sacrament. And as we want bread every day to support our mortal bodies, so we want grace every day to support our immortal souls, and to save us from death eternal.

May He, of His infinite mercy and goodness, vouchsafe us this blessing; and His will be done for the rest, for Jesus Christ His sake. To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, &c.

SERMON XLIX.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1736.

THE FOLLY OF UNDERTAKING ANY BUSINESS OF MOMENT, WITHOUT REGARD TO THE WILL AND HONOUR OF GOD.

PROV. xxi. 30.

There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.

I MUST first observe to you, how many words are here made use of by the Holy Spirit, to convince us of the folly of undertaking any business of moment, without regard to the will and honour of God. There is no *wisdom*, that is, no *discretion*, directing men what is fit to be done; no *understanding*, which can enable a man to see the issue of things; no *counsel* able to give advice, where the will and honour of God is not consulted, and His blessing and direction is not prayed for.

And one may take it for granted, that *this solemn meeting* was, *from the very beginning*, appointed to be ushered in by proper supplications and prayers for the blessing of God upon this government; and by proper instructions from *His* ministers, how His blessings are to be obtained, and secured.

Isaiah 30. 1. "Woe unto them that take counsel, but not of Me, saith the Lord." And the wisest men have found it so, to their cost and shame, when they have neglected to take God along with them in their politics.

The whole race of the kings of Israel, from Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who taught Israel to sin, to Hoshea the last king of Israel, who with his whole people were carried into captivity, are a known and flagrant instance of this truth,—*That no happiness is to be expected, where the glory, the honour, and true worship of God are overlooked or despised.*

They all went by this *worldly wise maxim*, that it would not be safe for them to let their people go to Jerusalem to worship, *as God had expressly commanded*, lest in time they should be tempted to submit to the kings of Judah; so they set up a worship of their own invention, which ended in an idolatry abhorred of God, and brought upon themselves and their people a miserable captivity, which continues to this very day.

We shall only mention one other instance of the truth and importance of these words just read to you; and this is of one of whose wisdom it is said, "that the counsel of Ahithophel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God." [2 Sam. 16. 28.] And he did certainly give Absalom such counsel as would have ruined his father most effectually, if God had not turned his wisdom into foolishness.

And that men might be convinced, that it was the work of God, and that He interposes in the affairs of men, the Scripture tells us expressly, "that it was God Who had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, that He might bring evil upon Absalom, as also upon his wicked counsellor." [2 Sam. 17. 14.] *Thus wicked counsels, sooner or later, fall upon the heads of those that give, and upon those that follow them.*

Now, this being a truth declared by the God of truth, and found such by experience, it follows (let foolish men despise it at their peril), that in all our counsels we should, in the first place, have an eye and regard to the honour, and will, and laws of God, or we shall soon see and feel our mistake.

This, the Apostle tells us, is the great end of civil power and government,—to be a terror to evil doers, and to encourage those that do well, that God in all things may be glorified. And consequently, all laws should be made, and counsels taken with an eye to these two great ends, *the glory of God, and the good of mankind.*

SERM. XLIX.

[Ps. 127. 1.] "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," saith holy David, a king himself, and a great master-builder in Israel. And his son sets this down for an

Prov. 16. 12. uncontested truth, "The throne," that is, the government of every nation, "is established by righteousness;" that is, by righteous laws, and putting them faithfully in execution.

Now, these are two things which every government should aim at: in the first place, to have RIGHTEOUS LAWS. In order to this, let it be considered, that God, the great proprietor of the world and all things in it, having given to certain persons power over the bodies, goods, estates, and even over the lives of their fellow-creatures; lest these, finding themselves vested with such high powers, should forget themselves and abuse their authority, as the Wise Man saith wicked men will be

Wisd. 2. 11. apt to do, and say, *Our strength and power shall be the law of justice;* most nations have found it necessary, and have agreed, to have laws to direct both those that are to govern, and those that are to obey.

Now, the two great ends of these laws should be, as we said before, first, *the glory of God;* and secondly, *the good of mankind.*

First, THE GLORY OF GOD: *such are laws,* to secure, as far as possible, the honour of God, His *name,* His *worship,* His *ordinances,* from being made light of, and profaned, by men who are given over to a reprobate mind.

Such also are laws, to secure true religion, and its ministers, from contempt, by punishing those that, forgetting themselves and their character, make the service of God to be despised: and by encouraging and securing the rights of such as serve faithfully at the altar against the sacrilegious attempts of covetous men.

Such are laws, which are proper to prevent wicked men from corrupting the principles and manners of weak and ignorant people; by punishing the crimes against the majesty of the great God, with *at least* the same degree of severity as crimes against the civil governors or private men.

And here, it must not be passed over in silence, that too many come amongst us, who bring all those evil dispositions and bad qualities along with them, which were the cause of their misfortunes at home.

Now, too many of these, instead of enjoying the happiness of a safe and undisturbed retreat and liberty, set up for directors or censurers of our magistrates and constitution both in Church and state; ridiculing the religion and discipline established amongst us; meddling with matters they do not understand; and, which is still worse, corrupting our youth with the basest examples of debauchery and profaneness; making a mock of sin; propagating the very vilest opinions; hardening young people against the advice of friends, against their own interest, and the fear of God and damnation.

And a sad truth it is, these, many of them, meet with too much countenance and encouragement, for the sake, as is pretended, of the advantages we receive from them.

Whether any advantages of this kind will countervail for the dishonour done to God, the mischiefs done to our people, and the judgments we have to fear, is what should very seriously be considered by all such as wish for the continuance of the happiness of this place.

The express condition of King Solomon's prosperity was this—"If thou wilt execute My judgments, then will I perform My word which I spake unto David thy father." And the only security which the people of God had for *their* prosperity and God's blessing was this—"That thou put away evil from among you." [1 Kings 6. 12.] [Deut. 13. 5.]

From all which it appears, not from *our* reasoning, but from the infallible Word of God, that the welfare and happiness of nations depend upon the restraint that is put upon vice and impiety, by good and wholesome laws, whereby the honour of God is secured from contempt.

And indeed, wherever God has placed any share of power or authority, it is for this very end, that He may not be provoked, by the dishonour done to *Him* and *His* laws, to pour down His judgments upon men and nations.

Next to the glory of God, the great end of laws and of civil government is, THE GOOD OF MANKIND; to secure the persons, the properties, and the peace of honest and well-meaning men, against the power, or the craft, of such as would invade or disturb them.

It is a good deal more than an hundred years since the

SERM. XLIX.

historian, Mr. Camden, gave the following account of the people of this Isle: "The inhabitants in general," says he, "have a very good character; not given either to *lewdness, cheating,* or *thievery;* so that every man possesseth his own in peace and safety, none living in fear of losing what he has." "This island," the historian adds, "is happier on another account than we are in England; for the people are free from vexatious and unnecessary law-suits; from long and dilatory pleas, and from frivolous feeing of lawyers, proctors, and attornies; all controversies being determined, without long process, every man pleading his own cause *viva voce.*"

Now this, we are too sure, is neither the case nor the character of the times we live in. Very late and melancholy instances we have had to the contrary. Many honest men's properties have been invaded, some by force, and some by fraud. The civil magistrate can tell us, how very litigious the people are grown of late, to the great increase of his burden, and the expense of his time; and the people, too many of them, have smarted by the mal-practice of such as live and gain by contention. The ecclesiastical magistrate meets every day with new, and heretofore unheard of, instances of the contempt of God and of religion.

Whether it be for want of better laws, to put a stop to these growing evils, with which an holy and righteous God must be highly displeased; or for any other cause, it will be worth the care of the legislature, *in the first place,* to make more effectual provision, that God in all things may be glorified; ever remembering, *that there is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord;* that is, where there is not a regard to His honour.

But even the best laws that *can be made* will be of little use, unless they are faithfully put in execution, and by men of religion and integrity.

It was said of the Athenians (as a learned man has observed), that they shewed a great deal of wisdom in making excellent laws, but a much greater folly in not observing them; and this was owing, in a great measure, to the negligence or corruption of the inferior magistrates. This the Romans took care to prevent in the beginning of their com-

monwealth, by requiring, under the severest penalties, that magistrates should be examples of that behaviour which they required of others. "If this," saith their great lawyer Cicero, "if this be observed, we have all that we can wish for."

And indeed, it is the highest false step that men in power and authority can make, to give any manner of countenance to men of wicked lives, or of loose and wicked principles. For, to be sure, that man who makes light of God, of His Word and laws, will, when he can do it with impunity, despise the magistrate, who is God's representative, and those laws which are made by him for the good government of the world.

Magistrates therefore, and all in authority, are above all others obliged to be upon their guard, because the lesser world will too readily follow their example, especially if bad; for so the corruption of human nature, which is prone to evil continually, will lead them too forcibly.

And what will be the natural consequence of this? Why, the fear of God will be forgotten; men will be left to themselves, and to the conduct of Satan; pride and luxury will follow; and to support these, covetousness, injustice, fraud, and knavery, will succeed; as also a litigious temper, a disregard for oaths, perjury, and oppressing one another; and lastly, which must ever be remembered by people of any consideration, *the judgments of God* upon a sinful nation, if these sins go unpunished; which they will be too apt to do, if the magistrate himself is wanting to his duty to Him Whom he represents.

To prevent this, it should be considered, that no one man on earth can claim the obedience of others by any natural right of his own, but as he is invested with authority and power from God, Who has ordained some to govern, and for that end to make righteous laws; and others to obey, and this on pain of His great displeasure.

If this were considered as it should be, those in authority would always govern with truth and justice; and such whose duty it is to obey, would obey for conscience' sake.

It was a powerful argument which Joseph, then governor of all Egypt, made use of to his brethren, who, not knowing him, were in the utmost fear for their lives and liberty: "This Gen. 42. 18.

SERM. XLIX.

do," says he, "and live; *for I fear God.*" That is, you may expect nothing but justice from one who professes to live in the fear of God. And what a powerful influence will this naturally have upon those who seek for justice.

When a man is secure of the magistrate's integrity, and that he shall not suffer in his rights, either by *partiality, corruption,* or the overbearing power of others, he will depend upon the justice of his cause, without employing men of no conscience to puzzle or mislead the magistrate with false assertions, suspected evidences, and doubtful precedents not warranted by law or justice.

And here I cannot but mention a passage which we have recorded in Scripture, to the praise of the greatest prince then on earth, as we find it in Esther i. 15; the king asks this question of his counsellors, "What shall we do unto the queen according to law?" How careful was this mighty prince to do nothing which the law would not justify; and set a rare example of justice to all about him, to make the law the rule of his conscience, and conscience the rule of his conduct!

Thus stands the duty of superiors with respect to their inferiors.

But there is another branch of duty, and a very important one, which, in a more especial manner, regards the honour and laws of God, as we before hinted.

The will of God is, that the laws which He has given for setting forth His own glory, and for the good of mankind, should be reverenced and obeyed by all; that sin be made uneasy to those upon whom reason and the fear of God have no effect; that wickedness of every kind be punished according to the nature of the offence; that the evil examples of such as scorn to be hypocrites in impiety, who make a mock of sin and damnation, and glory in making proselytes to Satan, that such be hindered by the severest penalties from corrupting others; that growing vices be carefully observed, and a timely stop put to them, before they become too many or too strong to be cured by any methods, except national judgments.

These are the undoubted duties of the civil magistrate, who, being in the place of God, stands bound to make His

will the rule of his actions, remembering the account he must one day give.

For *our* part, we are in duty bound, to keep awake the consciences of men with the remembrance of God's glorious attributes, and of a judgment to come; of His all-seeing eye; of His justice and vengeance upon hardened sinners; of His power to destroy both body and soul in hell; of the sad and certain consequence of dishonest gain; of the wasting vices of idleness and luxury; of the damning sin of blaspheming the name of the great God; of the great evil of vexatious controversies, and giving men trouble without cause; and lastly, of the absolute necessity of making restitution for injuries done our neighbour, to the best of our power, as ever we hope for salvation.

To conclude: let these things be considered as they should be, and we shall soon see the happy effects of taking God along with us, in all our actions and councils.

They that are in a superior rank will remember, that they are in the place of God, and will be careful not to bring contempt on Him Whose place they supply; the fear and regard for God and His laws being the best support of their own authority.

On the other side, they that are to obey will consider, that their superiors are in the place of God, and are bound to consult His glory; their obedience, therefore, will be more cheerful, their behaviour peaceable; and thankful will they be for the blessing of such a government.

And may God, the great governor of the world, give all His substitutes grace and a spirit to discern what will be most for His glory, and such as He will approve of at the great day; through Jesus Christ our Lord: to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory. *Amen.*

SERMON L.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1728.

THE SUPPRESSION OF VICE AND IMPIETY, THE DUTY OF ALL PERSONS IN AUTHORITY.

GENESIS vi. 1—3, 7.

See 2Chron. 15. 1—3; 17. 8—10; Ps. 12. 1; Jer. 5. 1; Ezek. 22. 25—27, 30; 33; Hosea 4; Wisd. 5. 23; Matt. 5. 13; Luke 17. 27.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them; that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man.—And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, &c.

THIS text will be better understood, and will have no difficulty in it, when it is read according to the most ancient versions and paraphrases, which thus render or explain the Hebrew:—*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them; that the sons of the sovereigns (who in Holy Scripture are called gods) seeing the daughters of the inferior sort, that they were fair, they took them by force, and ravished them at their pleasure;*—which thing was so provoking in the sight of God, that He declares [ver. 7], "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth;" which accordingly He did by the flood.

Why was God so provoked with *these* sins, and *these* sinners, above all others? There must be something very singular and very provoking, which could draw down so amazing,

and so general a judgment upon the whole race of mankind. And the reason was plainly this,—*The utter improbability that ever there would be a reformation, that ever the world would mend;* since they that were in power, and in the place of God, and whose duty it was to restrain and punish wickedness, were the very persons who promoted vice, by suffering it to go unpunished in their own children and families, or by their own evil example gave countenance to it; so that there was no way left to cure the evil, but by destroying the sinners.

And that *this* was the very cause of so universal a judgment is plain, from other instances of divine vengeance recorded in sacred Scripture, which were *then* executed, when wickedness became so universal that there were none to punish or to restrain it.

This was the case of Sodom, and the neighbouring cities; they were destroyed by fire from heaven. And that posterity might not be ignorant of the cause of so terrible a judgment, the sacred Scripture is so particular as to inform us, "that all the people both old and young," that is, both fathers and their children, both magistrates and the common people, were gathered together from every quarter, to commit a sin abominable to be named. [Gen. 19. 4.]

This is plain from God's own declaration, "If there be found TEN RIGHTEOUS PERSONS amongst them;" that is, if there be any amongst them who will execute justice and judgment upon the wicked, so that there may be any possibility of a reformation, "I will not destroy them, I will spare the whole for their sakes." [chap. 18. 32.]

There was indeed one, and but one, who had the heart or the courage to reprove them; but he wanted power to restrain them; and the people plainly told him so; "This one fellow came to sojourn amongst us, and he will needs be judge;" that is, he will take upon him to reprove, and to restrain us; "now will we deal worse with thee than with them." Gen. 19. 9.

Now, here being no possibility of a reformation, when they who should have put a stop to the wickedness, were at the head of those that committed it, Almighty God interposed His power, and utterly destroyed them by fire from heaven.

SERM. L.

The Scripture saith expressly of the people of Laish: "That there was no magistrate to put any man to shame in any thing." And the very next thing we hear of them is, *that they were utterly, every soul of them, destroyed.*

Judges 18. 7.

Another instance we have in the ruin of the whole tribe of Benjamin, except a very few men. There had been a most abominable sin committed by some sons of Belial; the rest of the tribes desired that those men might be punished as they deserved, so that God's judgments might be turned away from the whole land. This righteous demand was denied; and they that should have punished them took part with them. And the consequence was, they became partners with them in their utter destruction, which soon after followed.

Judges 20. 29, &c.

And to add no more instances: this one declaration of God, by His Prophet, shews plainly, what are the true causes of general judgments upon any land.

God, for the sins of the Jews, had resolved to send them into captivity; and to shew them the cause of their approaching misery, he bids the Prophet Jeremiah, "See now and know, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon them." It seems there were none such to be found, and their calamity and captivity very soon followed.

[chap. 5. 1.]

And as the negligence or wickedness of those in authority did, in these and many other instances, provoke God to pour down His judgments; so has the zeal of magistrates, either in punishing offenders, or in bringing men to repentance, saved whole nations from destruction. Thus we have it, "Then stood up Phineas, and executed judgment, and so the plague was stayed."

Ps. 106. 30.

And when God had fully determined, and *within a limited time,* to destroy the city of Nineveh, He was prevailed on to defer the execution of that judgment, by the king's proclamation, "that every one should turn from his evil way;" the king himself setting them the good example, "covering himself with sackcloth, sitting in ashes, and crying mightily to God."

Jonah 3. 6, 8.

This would now be made a jest of, and even by some who call themselves christians. A king in SACKCLOTH AND ASHES!

Yes, any thing rather than the vengeance of God upon his kingdom, than provoke Him *who can destroy both body and soul in hell.* [Matt. 10. 28.]

But to proceed: The very condition of King Solomon's prosperity, and of the continuance of the crown in his family, was this: "If thou wilt execute My judgments, then will I perform My word which I spake unto David thy father." 1 Kings 6. 12.

And the only security which the people of God had for the continuance of His protection and blessing, was the often repeated condition, "If thou put away evil from among you." [Deut. 17. 7.] This was *their*, and this is *our*, best and only security.

From what has been said, it appears, not from *our* reasoning, but from the infallible Word of God, that the welfare and happiness of nations depend upon their obedience to the laws of God and nature, and upon the restraint that is put upon vice and impiety, by such as are commissioned by God in His place.

And indeed, wherever God has placed any share of power and authority, it is for this very end—to keep the world in order, that He may not be provoked by their wickedness to send His judgments upon them.

From hence also it follows, that the sins of private people become the sins of the whole nation, and are the cause of national judgments, when the guilty continue unpunished by those who should call them to an account.

It is for this reason that the government of England, at this very time[a], has ordered *that certain abominable sins shall be prosecuted at the expense of the crown:* concluding, very truly, that when justice and judgment are duly executed upon wicked men, by such as have authority, God will not plague that nation, however He may punish particular offenders.

It behoves therefore every body, to whom God has imparted any share of His power and authority, from the king that sitteth upon the throne to the lowest; it behoves them, as they value the honour of God, the welfare of the society, or their own salvation, to make use of that power to discountenance and to punish vice and impiety.

Now, the authority which men have from God to restrain or punish sin, is either *natural, ecclesiastical,* or *civil.*

[a] In the year 1728.

SERM. L.

God has given PARENTS a power over their own children and families; and a great deal they may do, if they have any grace themselves, towards reforming the world, by a sober and good example; by bringing up their children in the fear of God; by stifling the seeds of corrupt nature when they first begin to spring up; and, by salutary chastisements, making every degree of sin uneasy to them, until they shall be able to understand the danger of sin with respect to another world.

And a sad account parents will have to make, if instead of doing so, they suffer their children, as they grow in years, to grow in sin; and either by an evil example, or by furnishing them with means of nourishing their natural corruptions, they leave a generation behind them more wicked than themselves.

But when parents (as it happens too often) do prove thus unnatural to their own children, God in mercy has provided other means to instruct, and to reclaim them, if men are not extremely wanting to their duty.

And these are, *first*, HIS MINISTERS, *who are commissioned to teach*, and to administer the means of grace and salvation to all such as are willing to receive them.

And *secondly*, HIS MAGISTRATES, who have their power from Him to restrain and to punish such as will not be taught and governed by milder means, by the ministry of the Word, and the discipline of the Church.

It is certain, that the WELL-BEING of the world, if not its SUBSISTING, depends upon the due and faithful exercise of these TWO POWERS. It will therefore be very proper to consider the duties both of those that are appointed by God to exercise these powers, and of those that are bound to obey them.

We will first consider the powers which God, by His Son Jesus Christ, has given to HIS MINISTERS, in order to regulate the manners of christians, and to keep men from bringing ruin upon themselves by their wickedness.

Their *commission* is recorded by St. Matthew in these
chap. 28. 19. words: "Go ye," saith our Lord to His Apostles, "and make disciples to Me in all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have com-

manded you; and lo! I am with you alway even unto the end of the world;" that is, with them and their successors.

Jesus Christ knew very well to what a perverse world He sent them; and therefore, to guard them and His own authority and commission from contempt, He declares, that He will always look upon Himself as injured, in the contempt any one shews to His ministers: "He that despiseth you, despiseth Me, and Him that sent Me." Luke 10. 16.

But does their power consist in this only, to teach men their duty, and to set before them the terrors of the world to come; and so to leave them to themselves? Very far from it. God has been more merciful to His poor creatures; and knowing how subject men are to sin, to forfeit His favour, and to make themselves liable to His anger, both in this world and the next; He has therefore invested His ministers with the *power of discipline;* that is, with a power not only to *exhort and to rebuke with all authority, but to put away from among christians* such as are an offence and a scandal to their profession, and to hinder them from ruining others. And he must be a person of a very profane spirit, who would set light by an ordinance which has God for its author, as Church discipline most certainly has. Tit. 2. 15; 1 Cor. 5. 13.

St. Paul's epistles are an unquestionable proof of this; and the practice of the pure primitive Church shewed how useful it was for the keeping the Christian world in some tolerable order.

The Church of England (in her office of commination) passionately wishes, *That this godly discipline may be restored; that notorious sinners may be put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, may be more afraid to offend.*

This Church[b], God be praised for it, is in possession of this discipline, in some good measure; and if, through the malice of the devil, and the perverseness of men, it has not always those saving effects which we could wish, and do pray for, this is no more an objection against the discipline of the Church, than it is against Christianity itself, or any of its ordinances, which are but too often abused by wicked men.

[b] In the Isle of Man.

SERM. L.

Must we therefore renounce Christianity, and neglect its ordinances? God forbid. Rather let us take more pains to make our people truly sensible of the blessing of Christianity, and of the reason of that discipline, which is designed, under God, to preserve it. For example:

That the Church is Christ's family; that all who are admitted into this family do solemnly promise to live as becomes so holy a society; that such as after this do become disorderly livers, and will not be reformed, ought to be turned out of the Church, till they become sensible of their error; that while they obstinately continue in that condition, they are deprived of all the means of grace, and hopes of salvation.

That as sure as baptism is the gate of salvation, and a real blessing, so sure is excommunication a real punishment, and to be dreaded more than any temporal punishment on earth. And it would certainly be so; and it would be the most powerful means of restraining vice and impiety, if christians would but consider, that although it be a sentence passed by men, yet it is a sentence passed by men commissioned by God, and who are answerable to God, if their sentence be not worthy of *Him*, and agreeable to His Word:

Even as the civil magistrate has, by God's Word, a right to do, *in civil matters*, whatever he judges necessary and lawful for the good of the society over which he is set.

And if either the civil or ecclesiastical magistrate mistake in their duty, or wilfully follow their own humour, they are answerable to God. And all that we have to do, if there be no superior to appeal to for redress, is to submit with patience, always remembering, that *this is not the world we were made for;* which will help to render the troubles of this short life more easy to be borne.

In short, Church discipline is necessary, as it is appointed by Jesus Christ. The ends proposed by it are, to reform wicked men, to remove scandals, and to prevent the judgments of God; and to obstruct, or to discountenance it, is to oppose an order of God for the good of the world, and for the salvation of particular men; a sin which will draw after it great judgments.

And sad experience may convince us, that where Church censures are set at nought, or ridiculed, the most damnable sins become the subject of mirth and laughter, rather than of horror, sorrow, and shame. A sure symptom of approaching judgments, when men are not content to neglect their own salvation, but take pains to pervert and ruin others!

And this brings me to consider the duty of private christians, with respect to the discipline of the Church, as it regards the suppression of vice and impiety, the subject we are upon.

And for this we have express rules in the Word of God. "We command you," (saith St. Paul,) "We command you, by the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother," that is, every christian, "that walketh disorderly." And in case of obstinacy, he gives this farther order; "Note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." [2 Thess. 3. 6.] [ver. 14.]

So that as sure as this is God's Word, there is nothing which christians ought more carefully to avoid, *than the giving of countenance to disorderly livers.*

But this is not all: "Them that sin," (saith the same Apostle,) "rebuke before all;" for this reason, "that others also may fear." And surely christians, who are not afraid for themselves when they see others called to an account for their sins, are not far from falling into the same, or into greater sins themselves. [1 Tim. 5. 20.]

To conclude, therefore, this head of our discourse: when discipline is administered, and obeyed, according to these rules of the Gospel, it must be one of the most effectual means of bringing sinners out of the snare of the devil, of restraining vice, and averting impending judgments; and therefore, being an institution of the Gospel, is not to be set aside by any human law.

This will not depreciate the use of human laws, or the authority of the civil magistrate, which being another appointment of God, for the punishment of vice and impiety, is now to be considered.

It is very sure, that men will not always be governed by motives of reason, religion, and conscience; if they would, there would be no need of any other authority than that of

SERM. L.

Church discipline, and the laws of the Gospel, to keep the world in order. But the good of the commonwealth requires, that such as will not be governed by religion and conscience, shall be restrained by outward force.

God has therefore given authority to the civil magistrate over the persons, estates, and even over the lives of men, to keep them from doing mischief to the public, and from ruining themselves.

But then this does not supersede, or make unnecessary, the use of Church discipline; for no christian sure can be so absurd as to imagine, that because a man has been punished by the civil magistrate, for *stealing*, or for *drunkenness*, or for *perjury*, or any *other crime*, that therefore he is qualified to receive the Holy Communion, or that he ought to be admitted to it, without giving marks of his repentance. This would be (with a witness) *to give that which is holy unto dogs*, [Matt. 7. 6.] contrary to our Lord's command; and to prostitute religion, and its mysteries, to the utmost contempt, and scorn of infidels.

And therefore my Lord Coke very justly reasons, when he saith, "that the ecclesiastical and temporal laws have several ends; the one to inflict punishment upon the body, to punish the outward man; the other to reform the inward, —that both may be reformed[e]."

For nobody ever questioned, but that the civil magistrates have their authority from God for this end, "That knowing Whose ministers they are, they may above all things seek God's honour and glory; that they may truly and indifferently minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of true religion and virtue."

And their power will go a great way towards the doing of this. For instance:

They can encourage such only as are good and virtuous, and take care that profaneness and impiety shall never be thought any qualification for favour or preferment. They can put marks of disesteem, and of infamy, if it be necessary, upon such as dishonour God and religion by their wicked lives. They can take care, that sins against God shall always be punished, at least with as great severity as those against

[e] Gibson's Cod. Jur. Eccl. Ang., p. 1077, fol. Lond. 1713.

men; or else God has given them a share of His own power to very little purpose. They can take care, that the laws which are made for the punishment of vice, and for the support of religion, be duly executed. And they will find it their interest, as well as duty, to do so, lest the example prove fatal to their own authority.

If they see wickedness increase, they can search into the cause of it; and if it is in their power (as generally it is), they can put a stop to growing vices; or else they do, in some sort, command what is in their power to prevent.

If *drunkenness*, for instance, or *whoredom*, or *profaning the Lord's day*, become reigning vices, they who are clothed with the authority of God, and zealous for His honour, will not find it difficult to discover the causes of such corruption, if they have a mind to remove them.

If *profaneness*, and *making a jest of religion*, and of every thing that has relation to God, if these vices prevail, a magistrate will easily see, that the surest foundation of his own authority is undermined, and will take timely care to prevent the mischiefs that may follow.

They can take care, that such as are in the way of their duty, and doing all in their power to suppress impiety, shall have proper assistance, countenance, and encouragement, and shall be secured from the insults of wicked men.

And especially they have it in their power, to set a good example of seriousness, sobriety, of justice, truth, and piety; always remembering, that there is not a greater affront to the Divine Majesty, than for a man to make use of the authority which he has received from God, to the dishonour of Him Whose substitute he is.

And if the Athenian Lawgiver had reason for this maxim, That the magistrate should obey the laws, as well as the people the magistrate, as they expected the government to last long; if this was true reasoning with respect to human laws, much more is it necessary to be observed with respect to the laws of God. For the law of God knows no respect of persons; all are subject to its sanctions; none are exempt from its penalties; and they that escape them here are sure to meet with them hereafter.

And indeed it would be a most *mischievous privilege*, with

SERM. L.

regard to the public, if any one might sin without rebuke, and consequently draw down judgments upon the whole community. This was the very case of the Israelites: "Did not Achan sin," saith the Scripture, "and wrath fell upon the whole congregation?" which could not be stayed till he had not only suffered for his iniquity, but *had given glory to God* in a free confession of his sin; acknowledging, that God is to be feared more than all earthly powers, and His judgments to be dreaded more than death.

[Josh. 22. 20.]

From which christians may see, that if ministers and magistrates should neglect their duty, and should forbear to call offenders to an account, yet this would indeed be no favour; unless we should be so weak as to think it an advantage to avoid shame and trouble in this life, which we may have justly deserved, and to meet with confusion and punishment eternal in the next.

Punishment is the due reward of sin; and every sin must be punished either here or hereafter; and, although the punishments and censures which either the magistrate or the Church inflict, have not always their wished-for and saving effects, yet they are neither of them to be laid aside for that reason, or despised. They will always have this good effect; they will stop the judgments of God from falling upon the society, while the governors thereof, who are in the place of God, do take care to punish wickedness. They have this good effect besides; those in power do their duty, and deliver their own souls.

And if we enquire into the reasons why punishments and censures have not their due and saving effects, we shall find, that it is owing *chiefly* to the countenance sinners meet with from such as should avoid them, as the Spirit of God expressly requires them to do.

A sinner must be strangely hardened indeed, who, being denied the means of salvation, and the free conversation of all sober christians, and the comforts of society, is not awakened, by the want of these blessings, into a sense of his interest and duty.

And as sure as *this Gospel* which I have in my hand is true, this is true; that to countenance notorious evil livers, or such as rebel against that discipline which Christ has or-

dained for the salvation of sinners, is "to be partakers with them in their evil deeds." And they will sooner or later, without a bitter repentance, share in their punishment. 2 John ver. 11.

It is indeed to make a jest of sin, of God's Word, and His threats therein contained; it is to make a mock of hell and damnation.

It is just doing what the Israelite did, in bringing a Moabitish woman in the sight of Moses, and the whole congregation. As if men were not only not afraid of men, nor of God, but as if they defied *Him, His authority,* and *His anger;* as if they were resolved to live in the profession of Christianity, with all the vices of heathens, on purpose to make the Christian religion more contemptible. Numb. 25.

These are generally the *last sins;* and when it is come to this, men are then filling up the measure of their iniquities.

But to return to our subject. God is the Author and Fountain of authority, both in the Church and in the State; these must therefore support one another in all lawful things, or both of them will suffer. And then, and then only, they answer the end of their institution, and the order of providence, when both concur to promote the honour of God, to suppress the growing vices of the age, and to prevent the wicked from infecting the good.

And one would think it should be as reasonable to keep notorious sinners from corrupting others, as it is to prevent such as have the plague from infecting those that have it not.

To conclude: Whoever does prevent any degree of sin, does certainly prevent some degree of judgments and misery to a nation; and is so far a benefactor.

May it please God to awaken all that are in authority, whether in Church or State, and make us sensible that we are answerable for all the sins which it is in our power to prevent, and that we have more souls besides our own to answer for.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

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